

# Reverse chameleon in the Kiwi jungle:

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*Identity construction of Pasifika theatre makers*

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## Abstract

This research fills a gap in the literature on Pasifika theatre, theatre made by immigrants from the Pacific Islands and their descendants in New Zealand; it addresses a new field and uses a rich set of data, specifically interviews, archives, performances, and plays. The thesis tracks how Pasifika theatre matured, and characterises this in four broad developmental stages. The first Pasifika plays were positioned within a monocultural environment, sharing their initial energy with Maori theatre. The second stage broke away from Maori theatre to have a more specific focus on Pasifika cultural issues. The third stage saw a flourishing of popular Pasifika theatre, with a Pan-Pasifika ideology. While in the first three stages there was a particular focus on migration, the fourth stage has seen a move toward issues that are more contemporary. Topics examined include gender, ethnicity, and the individuality of a community that has increasingly acculturated into New Zealand society. At the moment they are less connected with their ethnic and cultural roots; they are also showing more awareness of their position in New Zealand society.

Pasifika theatre makers identified with a larger Pan-Pasifika community, differentiating themselves from the Maori and European populations in New Zealand. At the same time, theatre makers used indigenous traditions, Western realist theatre conventions, and popular cultural references to comment on the socio-economic position of Pasifika people, and to entertain Pasifika audiences. For subsequent generations of Pasifika theatre makers, migration and its aftermath formed the primary master narrative, even though Pasifika people increasingly acculturated to New Zealand society. Consequently, new hybrid identities developed, which have become more prominent in Pasifika plays. Pasifika theatre attracts a growing number of European theatre goers who seek a safe encounter with the Other. Indeed, sixty years after the first waves of migration, Pasifika theatre makers still feel like outsiders in New Zealand's bicultural framework.



## Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure to thank those who made this thesis possible. I always thought writing a thesis would be like the experience described in Wordsworth's poem: walking among daffodils, yet wandering lonely as a cloud. I am indebted to those who made it not only possible but enjoyable, often dragging my feet to the ground.

I thank my supervisors for supporting my research and helping me to start a new life in New Zealand. The good advice, support, and friendship of Professor Janinka Greenwood has been invaluable through the last three years. I am grateful to my secondary supervisor, Alan Scott, who helped to develop my 'academic voice'. I am also indebted to my advisers who supported this project. I thank Amosa Fa'afoi for giving me an in-depth understanding of Samoan culture and protocols, and Dr Laura Peers from Oxford University for stepping in at a difficult time and jump-starting the final process. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Bridget Somekh for our discussions on ethics and her advice in the last months. My thesis would not have been the same without the help of Dr David Gegeo, who kindly introduced me to Pasifika epistemologies.

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I am forever indebted to my parents, sisters, and grandmother, who always believed in me and supported my endeavour to move to the other side of the world. Last but not least, I would like to thank my friends and partner, whose unequivocal support and consequent familiarity with Pasifika theatre deserve a far greater recognition than I can give.

## Declaration

I declare that all material presented in this dissertation is my own work. I confirm that any quotation or paraphrase from published or unpublished work of any other person has been duly acknowledged in this work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination to any other university other than for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Canterbury.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis aims to fill a gap in the scholarly literature that became apparent following the recent upsurge of Pasifika theatre productions. Pasifika is a term used in the New Zealand context to describe immigrants and their descendants from the Pacific Islands. The study employs a qualitative methodology to explore the research question: how do Pasifika theatre makers construct and perform their identities through theatre? The research has two main purposes: firstly to write a history of Pasifika theatre, and secondly to examine the socio-cultural context surrounding theatre making and debates on the social role of the artist, on identity construction and on post-colonial theatre in academia. Although the thesis has been written primarily for a scholarly audience, policy makers, funding bodies, and the practitioners themselves could also benefit from its conclusions.

Pasifika theatre has been a vibrant and growing form of post-colonial theatre since the 1970s. It is created by theatre makers who trace their heritage to the Pacific Islands and live in New Zealand. Today, over 260,000 people identify with the Pasifika ethnic group, which is 6.9 percent of the total New Zealand population (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). While the Pasifika population is not limited to the Northern Island, the majority of Pasifika people and consequently of Pasifika theatre is concentrated in the wider Auckland area (for detailed geographical information see Appendix 11). Pasifika theatre is made by a multi-ethnic group of Pasifika theatre practitioners whose work negotiates the contradictions between their heritage and urbanised life, set against the backdrop of New Zealand's bicultural framework. The title of this thesis evokes the image of a chameleon, a simile employed by one of the participants to describe the position of Pasifika theatre makers. Chameleons are known for their extraordinary natural camouflage owing to their ability to change colour in order to blend in with their surroundings. People are positively disposed to individuals who mimic their mannerisms, which researchers termed as 'Chameleon effect' experiment (1999). In the natural world, 'chameleons' also refer to a rare and particularly sought-after type of greenish diamond that turns yellow when heated, and a reverse chameleon is a diamond that changes the other way, from yellow to green (Matlins, 2011, p. 58). The concept of the 'reverse chameleon effect' can also refer to the experience of people of bicultural origin who seem to stand out, no matter what their environment (Fukuyama, 1999). The chameleon image is also performative, as emphasised by Tom Isaacs, Co-founder of The Cure Parkinson's Trust: 'it's all part of the show!! [...] I have started talking about what it's like to have Parkinson's. [...] It's kind of a reverse chameleon effect' (Isaacs).

Just like Tom Isaacs, Pasifika theatre practitioners have explicitly embraced their reverse chameleonic nature. Tusiata Avia, a performance poet, specifically used the term 'reverse chameleon' to describe how she feels like an outsider in Samoa, just as in New Zealand:

People ask[ed] [...] 'where are you from', ... and I invariably said I am Samoan, because I had to describe myself....Often I feel much less Samoan when I am in Samoa, and more Samoan when I am away. Kind of a reverse chameleon actually. (AVI)<sup>1</sup>

The image of the reverse chameleon sheds light on a dilemma in Pasifika identity caused by migration. The second part of my thesis title is drawn from Manusaute, actor and founding member of Kila Kokonut Krew, who likened the lot of the Pasifika population in New Zealand to animals down the pecking-order in a natural hierarchy: 'we are not the kings of the jungle here, because there is another king, we just try to fit in' (MAN). In this cosmology, Pasifika people are positioned as inferior to the European population, the 'king of the jungle', who determine the rules of the game. While practitioners have increasingly acculturated into New Zealand society, and in many regards have blended in, they often felt as if they were outsiders: as Aumua, an emerging playwright and comedian, pointed out, they 'are torn between two cultures' (AUM). To straddle the gap, practitioners explore stories and characters that juxtapose different cultures and identities. Because they are well positioned to speak to both Pasifika and other audiences, they can use theatre constructively. They portray characters who break Pasifika stereotypes which are prevalent among European audiences, and raise awareness of social issues among Pasifika audiences - thus empowering Pasifika people. Nonetheless, a reverse chameleon is still a chameleon, as even though practitioners describe how they stand out in both cultures, they also seek to blend in. Pasifika theatre carries the legacies of colonialism and migration, and is embedded in the unique bicultural context of New Zealand. The effects of colonialism, intensifying migration, and growing diasporas are global phenomena that may be discussed within the bracket of the 'post-colonial condition'. Pasifika theatre is also unique in that it combines Western models and global elements of pop culture with Pacific heritage. The tension between global, local, and traditional also affects the evolving identities of Pasifika people.

This thesis identifies a gap in the literature on Pasifika identity in theatre. While identities are discussed in terms of health, education or popular media, the literature to this date has not addressed theatre as a source of identity change. Theatre is unique because practitioners can use it as a process for exploring their own identities, and at the same create a space in which audiences

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews with practitioners are referenced abbreviating the interviewee's names, for further information and a comprehensive list of interviews quoted see: Section 1.4 on Style and Appendix 2.

identify with the stories and characters in relation to their own search for identity. Pasifika identities are taken to be moving from traditional toward more Westernised and contemporary identities, as described by Fleras and Spoonley (1999), Macpherson (1997), Keddel (2000), Tupuola (1998b), and Mila-Schaaf (2010). This, I argue, is noticeable in Pasifika plays as there is a change from migration to contemporary stories. In this study, both the medium of theatre and the theatre industry are lenses through which the evolving identities of practitioners and characters are explored. Identity is frequently thought of as synonymous with 'culture'. Culture pervades the space around practitioners through 'a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms', which Geertz saw as fundamental to practitioners' 'knowledge about and attitudes toward life' (Geertz, 1993, p. 89). This study explores practitioners' cultural identity in particular detail, but also highlights other identities, e.g. theatre makers' identify as theatre professionals or as part of an ethnic group.

### **1.1 Thesis structure**

Chapter 2 gives an overview of Pacific migration to New Zealand, as well as biculturalism and multiculturalism in New Zealand. It reviews theories of identity and Pasifika identities, and provides a brief summary of the self-determination of Pacific people. It then explores theories of post-colonial theatre, before concluding with a review of research literature on Pasifika theatre. Chapter 3 sets out the methodological framework employed in this study. The methodology section of the chapter introduces Pasifika methodologies, along with the social constructivist world-view upon which the thesis is premised. In the second part of the chapter, data collection, data analysis, and research ethics are discussed in detail.

Chapter 4 contains the first systematic history of Pasifika theatre. Participants<sup>2</sup> interviewed for this study expressed a concern that what is taught about Pasifika theatre in New Zealand is insufficient or unreliable. An overview of Pasifika theatre history is long overdue. Whilst there are isolated instances of print-space being dedicated to Pasifika theatre (see Chapter 2), the overall situation is one of neglect: there is still no monograph on any aspect of Pasifika theatre, and the scattering of publications touching on the topic fail to do justice to its range and diversity. This concern was expressed vociferously by Oscar Kightley, the omnipresent Pasifika theatre practitioner, director, actor, playwright, TV-producer, and stand-up comedian: 'there is Niu Sila, and that is it. It is just not enough!' (KIG). Kightley stressed that some progress had been made in schools, but Pasifika plays remain underrepresented in curricula. University programmes that cover Pasifika theatre in their

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<sup>2</sup> Interviews and personal communication with Pasifika theatre practitioners.

courses were singled out for derision by practitioners who labelled them 'superficial' and 'unreliable' (ANO1; IFO). Erolia Ifopo, one of the founders of Pacific Underground, was motivated to teach and tutor because students were largely ignorant of Pasifika theatre and film productions (Ifopo, 2002, p. 292). Chapter 4 attempts to redress this imbalance by tracing the development of Pasifika theatre from the 1970s to the present day, presenting the major performances and practitioners. The chapter consists of four sections, each dedicated to a different stage of Pasifika theatre.

The substantive part of the thesis is made up of four analytical chapters that survey how Pasifika theatre practitioners construct and perform their identities. Chapter 5 explores Pasifika theatre makers' identity as outsiders in New Zealand. The chapter revisits the twentieth century debate on the social role of art and the artist, and asks whether Pasifika theatre aims to mirror society or to provoke social transformation. There is a strong link between Pasifika theatre makers' identity and their aim to represent their communities and act as agents for social change. Chapter 6 explores how Pasifika theatre was influenced by a combination of indigenous Pacific and Western performative styles, and by global pop culture. I draw attention to the perceived differences between European and Pasifika cultures, and to the consequent processes of cultural and artistic control. In Chapter 7 it is established that Pasifika theatre practitioners' primary point of reference is migration, and attention is drawn to the paradox that while the population has largely acculturated into New Zealand society, there is also a growing awareness of loss. I further draw attention to a narrative shift, as plays have moved from migration to tackling contemporary social ills. Chapter 8 explores the increasing number of European theatre-goers. I argue that this highlights a division in audience motivation: the Pasifika audience attends the theatre for its familiar Pasifika themes, and to be entertained, while the European audience seeks a safe encounter with the Other. In the same chapter I explore how audience demographics will affect the future Pasifika theatre, and suggest that the audience expectations and need, divided between Europeans and Pasifika, constitute a dilemma for theatre makers. I argue that the implication of growing European audiences does not need to influence Pasifika theatre, because in its current form it satisfies both the Pasifika audience's need for familiarity, and the European audience's search for the exotic. However, the influence of global popular culture combined with self-deprecating humour could result in stronger negative stereotypes. Such a development could slow down the self-determination of Pasifika people and decrease interest in Pasifika theatre among those audiences who expect new and exotic theatre.

## 1.2 Methods

This study took place from 2009 to 2012. Its research design is founded in grounded theory and informed by ethnography. It uses interviews, observations, drama analysis, and archival research to unpack theatre practitioners' views and the development of Pasifika theatre. The majority of the data collection took place between 2009 and 2011, and comprises 29 interviews with theatre practitioners, a data set of approximately 3400 newspaper articles, and reviews and analyses of numerous plays. This data was augmented by personal attendance at theatre shows, examinations of recordings from earlier productions, attendance at major events, including the Pasifika Festival, gallery openings, and Playwrights Forum, and by a reflective journal kept throughout.

The research is embedded in a dual methodological framework which reflects the topic studied: the meeting point of two cultures. While a Western, constructivist paradigm is dominant, the study is informed by Pasifika methodologies. Theories on the researcher's presence have become a critical point of qualitative research since the 1990s. Denzin and Lincoln explain that 'qualitative researchers are unable to directly capture lived experience' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 19). Such experiences, it is argued, are created in the final text written by the researcher, a conundrum Denzin termed a 'crisis of representation' (ibid). Qualitative research does not claim to be objective and neutral, a corollary of which is increased scrutiny of the researcher's world-view and position. In order to facilitate this, a brief excursus on my personal background is included below.

## 1.3 Positioning

I grew up in Hungary, a country where Hungarians make up over ninety per cent of the population. The largest minority is the Roma population. This, then, was a monocultural environment in which the Roma were the only 'Other' I encountered. The Roma people I knew were different from the romanticised ideas of 'travelling gypsies' and 'world class musicians' I later encountered abroad. They were also different from the negative stereotypes commonly associated with them, and, though it took time to overcome deeply ingrained stereotypes, the Roma I met appeared perfectly 'normal' – they went about their business, went to school and work, just like everyone else. Except, they were frequently discriminated against. These early encounters demonstrated the gap between racist representation in the media and first-hand experience and observation. As I moved through different environments, I encountered the evolving problems surrounding multiculturalism and migration; I experienced the Ayaan Hirsi Ali scandal at its height in the Netherlands<sup>3</sup>, and my

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<sup>3</sup> Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a Somali-Dutch political activist. She sought asylum in 1992 in the Netherlands, and in 2003 she was elected as a member of the House of Representatives in the Netherlands. Hirsi Ali strongly criticised the Islam, and was known as an outspoken and controversial figure in Dutch politics. In 2006, it was revealed that when originally applying for asylum, she gave false information about her name and

time in Britain made me acutely aware of the low socioeconomic status of and discrimination against minorities. By the time I arrived in New Zealand, I was a serial migrant myself, having experienced displacement, discrimination, and different cultures first hand. These experiences fuelled my interest in migration and equipped me with the awareness of my outsider status in New Zealand, a fact that was emphasised throughout the research process.

Given my position as an outsider and the increasingly politicised ethnic politics in New Zealand, I was quick to confront potential problems, such as whether or not Pasifika methodologies conflict with the research process – specifically, whether Pasifika notions of freedom restrict the research. One of the early difficulties was finding an appropriate term by which to refer to minorities characterised (among other things) by shared origin, history, and ethnicity. This issue is discussed at some length in Chapter 3, but a brief overview of critical terms is included below.

#### **1.4 Style**

Naming is a sensitive issue, both politically and academically. In order to satisfy the requirements of the former, consistency is strived for throughout. The term Pasifika was chosen to describe people in New Zealand who trace their ethnic origins to the Pacific Islands because it originated within the community itself, and consequently is an example of empowerment and agency. The fact that it is also unambiguously situated in New Zealand was also significant. Further, Pan-Pacific and Pan-Pasifika movements are differentiated; the former indicates the unification of Pacific people in the Pacific region, whereas the latter encompasses Pasifika people in New Zealand. The terms first-, second- and third-generation Pasifika people are used throughout the thesis to refer to different generations of immigrants. The term European is chosen as an umbrella term to describe New Zealanders of European descent. In-text citations (author-year) and bibliography are consistent with the APA 6<sup>th</sup> referencing format<sup>4</sup>, and participant interviews are cited by their surname's first three letters.<sup>5</sup> Participants wishing to remain anonymous were given a pseudonym, and these may be consulted in Appendix 2.

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circumstances to the authorities. As a result of the extended media coverage and the potential of losing her Dutch citizenship, she resigned from Parliament. Her political statements as well as the scandal itself raised issues about the role of Islam, migration, and refugees in the Netherlands.

<sup>4</sup> When there are multiple authors with the same surname, this format distinguishes them in text by including their initials

<sup>5</sup> When the first three letters of participants' surnames are identical, the first name is indicated as a distinguishing factor. Further discussed in 3.5: Presenting the research.



## **Chapter 2: Conceptual framework**

The interdisciplinary nature of the research requires its theoretical background to be from different, though overlapping and linked disciplines. This first part of this chapter positions the research by outlining the interrelating theoretical contexts, including Pacific migration, bi- and multiculturalism, theories of identities and post-colonial theatre. The second part discusses the literature about Pasifika theatre.

In New Zealand, the coloniser-colonised dynamics exists between both the indigenous Maori and Europeans, and the Pasifika people who immigrated to New Zealand where they encountered both historic and contemporary power dynamics. The indigenous populations continue to carry the legacy of colonial times, the colonial structures that percolated through all aspects of life, from government structures, law, education, trade to religion, languages and culture, formally and informally. These effects are interlinked and cause change in these societies. Pacific people's migration did not annul the effects of colonisation, but re-located Pacific peoples to the centres of transnational networks including Australia, New Zealand and the United States. As a result, the new context may be described as one of post-colonial diasporic migration. Consequently, migrants' experiences are like a mat that is woven by different postcolonial societies, including that of their origin and the one they currently live in. Diasporas also play an important role because Pasifika people maintain relations with the countries of origin. This experience is further expanded by the ethnic and cultural diversity of countries of origin, settlements, with more and more Pasifika people claiming multiple ethnicities (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). The theoretical framework gives an overview of the interrelating theoretical contexts, specifically Pacific migration, bi- and multiculturalism in New Zealand, debates on theories of identities and transformation of Pasifika identities, and postcolonial theatre. The literature on Pasifika theatre is explored on the second part of the chapter, situating it in the context of the above theoretical frameworks and trends in theatre. The chapter outlines not only the relevant scholarly literature but also the context in which Pasifika theatre is embedded.

### **2.1 Pacific migration to New Zealand**

The dominant trend in Pasifika research has been to explore Pacific migration and diaspora. Migration became a reference point in the history for Pasifika people, and it is a central theme in Pasifika theatre. The diaspora, on the other hand, started to receive attention more recently, which is reflected in the lack of available information on the Pacific diaspora and Pasifika theatre. In the following section I briefly outline the history of Pacific Island migration to New Zealand.

'Islanders have been moving around the Pacific as long as memory recalls' Spickard et al. point out in their description of the Pacific diaspora (Spickard, Rondilla, & Wright, 2002, p. 2). Polynesia was populated

through several waves of migration, and inter-island movement continued. However, migration from the Pacific Islands to the economic centres, such as New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, only intensified after WWII. Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of immigrants to New Zealand came from UK, Ireland, and mainland Europe through assisted migration schemes. After WWII the demand for unskilled migrants grew, and the policies that had favoured migrants of a European background became unsustainable. The new migrants, predominantly unskilled labourers, filled the rapidly growing economies' labour shortage (V. B. Hall & McDermott, 2009; Stahl & Appleyard, 1997). Principles of supply and demand in labour resulted in significant movement from the peripheries to the industrial centres. In the 1950s, Pacific migrants were mainly women in domestic help positions. During the 1960s, most arrivals were unskilled male workers, employed in Auckland factories (Phillips, 2009). New policies, such as more attainable Work Visas, in the host countries supported the migration movement. At this time, New Zealand granted citizenship to residents of the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau, the former two in free-association, the later as a dependent of New Zealand (Stahl & Appleyard, 1997). Consequently, the number of migrants from Asia and the Pacific Islands grew rapidly in the post-war years. Between 1951 and 1972 the number of Pasifika people increased more than sevenfold; during this time, immigration restrictions were relaxed and political rhetoric started to promote tolerance and acceptance toward migrants (Beaglehole, 2009a).

By 1971, 30% of all foreign-born immigrants originated from outside of the Commonwealth (Beaglehole, 2009b). Simultaneously, a Maori cultural revival began, and internationally, civil-rights movements, and independence movements in the British colonies questioned existing ethnic politics. New Zealand had a large non-European immigrant population and a strengthening Maori cultural identity. Yet, racist attitudes intensified. The narrator in Diana Fuemana's play, *Falemalama* vividly describes the era: 'it was 1972: the era of the dawn raid in Auckland. For years, the pigs broke into overcrowded houses in the early hours, arresting Polynesian families, putting them in jails, sending them back to where they came from' (Fuemana, 2008, p. 69). Although not all overstayers were of Polynesian descent, Pasifika people were targeted most intensively (Beaglehole, 2009b). The Dawn Raids later became a reference point in Pasifika people's history, and in theatre they became a symbol of discrimination against Pasifika people.

Changes in migration and policy react to economic and political changes, thus migration and policy-making mutually influence each other. An example for this influence is from the 1970s: as the economy slowed down, and the need for unskilled migrants decreased as competition for employment grew. This in turn resulted in accelerating racism, and changes in migration policy, such as introducing quotas on new migrants, and finally in a decrease in immigration (Phillips, 2009). A new skill-based system was introduced

to evaluate potential migrants (Phillips, 2009). As a result, fewer Pasifika people migrated to New Zealand. Nevertheless, migration continued in the 1970s and 1980s.

Despite the influx of new migrants being halted, the Pasifika population boomed in the 1990s (Statistics New Zealand, 2011). At the same time, due to changes in economy and restructuring of New Zealand industry in the mid-1980s, the number of unemployed Pasifika people increased sharply (Appleyard & Stahl, 1995). National statistics show that the Pasifika unemployment rate was 7.3% above the national average in 2009 (6.1%) (Ministry of Social Development, 2010b). To this day, Pasifika people are overrepresented at the lower end of the labour market; in 2009 median hourly earnings for Pasifika people was \$16.5 compared to \$20.83 national average (Ministry of Social Development, 2010a).

## **2.2 Biculturalism and multiculturalism in New Zealand**

Pasifika people's ethnic minority position is an important issue in literature. The Maori, New Zealand's indigenous population, were colonised by the Crown. The interest of 'newer' non-European migrants', like that of Pasifika people, is often considered problematic because it is associated with multiculturalism, which some see as opposing biculturalism (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999). Recognition of tension caused by positioning of Pasifika people is essential to the understanding of the position of Pasifika theatre in New Zealand, and to practitioners' self-positioning in New Zealand.

### **2.2.1 Biculturalism**

The Treaty of Waitangi, a contract between the Maori (Tangata Whenua) and the Crown, defined New Zealand as a binational country. Although the Treaty had not been enforced consistently, the Maori cultural revival in the 1970s used the Treaty as a point of reference (Ritchie, 1992; Spoonley, Pearson, & Macpherson, 1996). At this time, a number of symbolic events signalled the Maori renaissance. In 1973 Waitangi Day became the National Day of New Zealand, and it was followed by The Land March, the Treaty of Waitangi Act, and The Waitangi Tribunal. Since then, debates on the cultural, political, and economic rights of the Maori filtered into mainstream political discourse of New Zealand (A. Sharp, 1997). The Maori cultural renaissance was simultaneous with indigenous revivals in other democratic countries that had been struggling with their multicultural populations and the legacies of colonialism, for example Australia and Canada (Ongley & Pearson, 1995).

In the 1970s political views among Pasifika people and Maori became more radical (Melani Anae, Lautofa, & Burgoyne, 2006). Movements, such as the Polynesian Panthers, wanted to preserve culture and improve living conditions. Melanie Anae, a specialist in Pacific studies, explains that the movement 'provided an opportunity for New Zealand-borns to express their solidarity with the Maori liberation struggle, and to

express their own identity as Pacific People [...] it was a stand saying: We're not going to take it anymore' (Melani Anae et al., 2006p. 58). The policy of biculturalism was implemented during the 1980s under the labour government (Spoonley, 2005). Augie Fleras and Paul Spoonley argue that binationalism and biculturalism aspire to restore power dynamics between the indigenous and the colonisers. The supporters of biculturalism sought justice, equal power and representation, and compensation as a recognition of the effects of colonisation (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999). Maori theatre reflected this argument, as a significant proportion of plays dealt with loss and recovery of land, ancestry, and claims for power. Although biculturalism is still widely supported in New Zealand's political rhetoric, Elisabeth Rata is concerned because after the first decade of cultural revival the bicultural political discourse shifted its focus from 'culture' to 'ethnicity', which implies that culture was seen as a product of ethnicity (Rata, 2010). This link between culture and ethnicity further divided the Maori and Europeans (ibid). Rata argues that after this shift, neo-tribes were established that regulated inclusion and exclusion for those with Maori ancestry. As a result, negative consequences of bicultural policies are prominent: there is growing ethnic division, and while a powerful Maori elite emerged, Maori's socioeconomic problems prevail (Rata, 2000). In this way, Maori became more powerful, but the side effects described above suggest a growing division in the population.

### **2.2.2 Multiculturalism**

From the 1970s, at the time of the first bicultural policies, a change from assimilation policies to multicultural policies took place. The new policies targeted racism with assimilation-oriented policies, and at the end of the 1990s a more inclusive and multifaceted model was introduced, which advocated new migrant's rights and culture (Hill, 2010; McClean, Berg, & Roche, 1997; Meredith, 1998; M. Reilly, 1996; Spoonley, 1997). Multiculturalism's effect on policy making is problematised by scholars such as Will Kymlicka, who questions ethnic groups in society, in particular rights for social representation and freedom of cultural expression (polyethnic rights) (1996). Rights for freedom of expression are becoming more important in New Zealand as can be seen in the funding allocated to Diwali celebrations and the annual Pasifika festival (Chambers, 2009). Kymlicka insists that polyethnic rights 'impede the integration of immigrants by creating a half-way house between their old nation and citizenship in the new one, reminding immigrants of their different origins instead of their shared symbols, society and future' (Kymlicka, 1996, p. 178). This view is challenged by Bhikhu Parekh (2000, #81), the political theorist, who points out that Kymlicka fails to problematise the distinction between migrants and citizens. He opposes Kymlicka's negative views on polyethnic rights and emphasises the importance of unity and diversity, pointing out that diversity is not a burden but an asset to society as a whole.

### **2.2.3 Compatibility and applicability**

Biculturalism differs from multiculturalism because the two models represent and advocate different groups of society: biculturalism is used to refer to the dynamics between indigenous and Europeans, while multiculturalism advocates the interest of non-Anglo-Saxon migrants, who are neither of Maori nor European heritage (Durie, 2005; Fleras & Spoonley, 1999). The increase of Pasifika population already had an impact on multicultural policies, which are expected to undergo a further change in policies due to strengthening Pasifika identities (Spoonley, 2000).

Multiculturalism may be accepted in theory, but its practical implementation is met with confusion and opposition by those who see it as hindering the development of biculturalism. Fleras and Spoonley argue that implementation is unclear because as migrants move upward on the educational, social, and economic ladder, policies focusing on resources and advocacy can become redundant, thus a shift toward culture and languages may be wanted (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999). This view goes beyond Kymlicka's argument about what rights immigrants 'should have', and questions how resources should be distributed among citizens of a migrant background.

Views on multiculturalism can echo the 70's racist attitudes toward Pasifika people (Henderson, 2003; Ip & Murphy, 2005; Ward & Lin, 2005). Some suggest that multicultural policies should be implemented only after biculturalism is developed, because, as Ranginui Walker, the Maori academic and writer, points out, migrants may impinge on Maori rights in New Zealand (A. T. P. Mead, 1996; Walker, 1995). In his assessment of bi-and multiculturalism, Edward Taihakurei Durie (2005) emphasises that cultural tolerance and support should be maintained in the case of recent migrants but emphasises that immigrants did not found the country and as such, their culture should not be incorporated into the education or legal system. Negative attitudes toward migrants prevail in the population, especially among Maori and other less advantaged social groups (Gendall, Spoonley, & Trlin, 2007).

These negative opinions also contradict the popular idea of a strong political solidarity between Maori and Pasifika people based on a common mythic place of origin, 'Hawaiiki'. In the past, writers such as Epeli Hau'ofa, Fiji Island writer and anthropologist, advocated solidarity because it can unify and mobilise populations (Hau'ofa, 1994). Based on increased cooperation between Maori and Pasifika, especially prominent in the 1970s, even today it is hypothesised that similarities in culture, shared living circumstances, ancestry, and class result in solidarity and support between the Maori and Pasifika people (Hill, 2010; Ip, 2006; M. P. J. Reilly, 2011). However, Maori scholars' negative attitudes question if solidarity in contemporary society is one-sided or even mythic. In addition, as large-scale immigration of Pacific peoples to New Zealand and the urbanisation of the Maori were simultaneous, Pasifika people and Maori

often shared spaces and competed economically against each other. Thus, it may be that solidarity is replaced by competition. I propose that Pasifika theatre reflects increased ethnic conflict caused by economic competition.

## **2.3 Identities**

Rogers Brubaker describes an 'identity crisis' in social sciences because identity is overused and often undefined (2004). Within the constructivist framework, which this study adopts, there were a number of attempts to define identity. Henri Tajfel defines identity in relation to the individual's attachment to a group. According to him identity is 'that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to membership' (Tajfel, 1982). In light of recent constructivist theories of identity, Stuart Hall defines identity in relation to the individual's positioning: 'identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past' (S. Hall, 2003, p. 236). Hall's definition, adopted by this study, problematises identity by describing it as a result of the individual and the historical context. More importantly for this study, Hall theorises identities to be performative as people use them to construct and narrate their image in the past. This study examines social identities, in particular ethnic and cultural identities.

### **2.3.1 Ethnic and cultural identities**

Ethnic identity is based on identification with one or more ethnic groups. Donald L. Horowitz's widely accepted definition, see for example Varshney, Chandra, Wilkinson, Htun, and Posner, describes ethnic identity as an umbrella term that 'easily embraces groups different by colour, language and religion, it covers 'tribes', 'races', 'nationalities' and 'castes' and 'is based on the myth of collective ancestry, which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate' (Chandra, 2004; Horowitz, 1985, pp. 52-53; Htun, 2004; Posner, 2005; Varshney, 2002; Wilkinson, 2004). While mythical ancestry sometime relies on innate characteristics, it is most often constructed with a purpose, famously described by Max Weber as 'important for the propagation of group formation' (Weber, Roth, & Wittich, 1968, p. 398). Pasifika ethnicities can be considered an ethnic group in two ways, depending on the perspective and strategic purpose of the application: Pan-Pacific identities are based on a common mythical place of origin, Hawaiiiki, while ethnicity specific identities, e.g. Tongan, Samoan, and Fijian, are based on the migrants' island of origin.

Cultural identities are not defined by mythic ancestry, but by a shared culture, what Clifford Geertz defined as 'a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life' (Geertz, 1993, p. 89). Cultural

identity in a broader sense includes the categories of gender, religion, language, and location, and it often overlaps with ethnic identity. Cultural identity changes over time; it can be different for first and second-generation immigrants from the same ethnic group, and culture of young adults may be similar, despite having different ethnicities (Holliday, 2010; Phinney, 1990). Globalisation also changed cultural identity, argues John Tomlinson: before globalisation identity was static, and cultural and ethnic identities were closely related; they were both tied to the individual's physical location, cultural experiences, and inheritance. After globalisation, the continuity between past and present was abruptly broken, and cultural identities multiplied and changed (Tomlinson, 2000). Tomlinson's comparison of pre- and post-globalisation cultural identities points to a larger question in social scientific discourse: are identities fixed or fluid, set or constructed?

### **2.3.2 Identities: constructed and performed**

Since the 1970s, identity has most commonly been seen as constructed and changing. Stuart Hall, in his seminal work *Who needs identity?*, argues identity should be seen as a process of construction.

Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a "production", which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term, "cultural identity", lays claim. (S. Hall, 2003, p. 233)

Cultural identity is thus seen as fluid and constructed. As the idea of primordial roots is deemed irrelevant, studies which question the authority of cultural identity instead examine the change of social facts (Gerson, 2001).

Cultural identities connect individuals and communities with their past. According to Hall, cultural identities do originate in history, but rather than being a continuation of the past, they are constructed after ruptures in history (S. Hall, 2003, p. 238). Thus, when an individual or community are at an 'unstable points of identification or suture', constructed within historical and cultural discourses, there is a need for identification, and re-positioning that stabilises the situation (S. Hall, 2003, p. 238). In Pasifika people's lives, colonialism, migration, and acculturation are the largest ruptures through which cultural identities are constructed.

Identities are constructed based on difference. In marginalised groups, the steps of collective identity construction are identified as formation of boundaries, which serve as a border between dominant and non-mainstream groups, and the resulting emergence of shared consciousness, aims and politicisation processes (V. Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Power and knowledge are inherent to identity construction in the post-colonial context marked by continuous emphasis on difference, argues Hall (S. Hall, 2003). Power is not exerted from

the outside only, because as subjects internalise 'Otherness' they themselves assert differences. Jacques Lacan (Lacan & Sheridan, 1977) wrote of the Other in whose gaze the viewer gains identity, while Edward Said (2003) used the term 'othering' in post-colonial studies to describe the process whereby identity is created by emphasising contrast to another group. Identity emerges when the 'Self' and Other meet, and it is strengthened by a continuing emphasis on difference. Theatre mirrors theatre makers' life experiences and reflects society. According to the playwright Genet, identities are constructed through the Other, and rituals highlight one group's distinctiveness from the Other (Plunka, 1992). Theatre making is then a constellation of mirrors, realities, identities, and systems of power, and identity is constructed rather than authentic. It is constructed through signs and opposing signs, the way mirror images face mirror images (Plunka, 1992). In Genet's work, identities are constructed through the Other, and they are kept alive by rituals of identity making. In *The Blacks* blackness only exists in opposition to whiteness (Genet, 1967). This difference suggests that before colonisation, the distinction between black and white did not exist due to lack of contact, but colonialism, slavery, and the European gaze created distinction and identities immediately by marking humans based on skin colour. Genet's theory sheds light on how theatre can be a means of post-colonial resistance and identity construction. Identity construction is based on difference from the Other that positions the individual within the power structures and discourses. By asking how Pasifika theatre practitioners construct their identity through theatre, the thesis inevitably asks, who are the Others for Pasifika theatre practitioners and how does the differentiation affect their identities.

Fredrik Barth (1969) argues that symbols keep the difference and thus identity alive; Jean Genet, the playwright, thought rituals highlight one group's distinctiveness from the Other (Plunka, 1992). Rituals here have a relatively broad meaning, as Joseph Hermanowicz and Harriet Morgan argue, 'groups affirm their identities that 'ritualise' the routines of their communal life' (Hermanowicz & Morgan, 1999, p. 198). Groups construct and conserve cultural identity through 'ritualised routines'. Groups use ritual performances such as protests or festivals to perform their identities (Schechner, 1985; Victor Turner & Schechner, 1986). Richard Schechner and Victor Turner, the founding fathers of performance research, argue that while performances have multiple functions, they fulfil different ritual and entertainment purposes. Schechner's observation of the Ram Lila Festival in India illustrates how rituals, entertainment and identity construction go together: pilgrims, assert their religious and cultural identity and are also entertained while visiting the religious festival, which incorporates theatre, dances, and other performative events (Schechner, 1985). The performativeness of cultural identity questions whether Pasifika theatre performances are also sites of cultural identity constructions for audience and practitioners.



### **2.3.3 The quandary of essentialised identities**

Before social constructivist and postmodern theories of identity, identities were thought of as essentialised. Essentialised identities are defined as resting in an unchanging core of a human being (Cerulo, 1997, p. 386). Collective members are thought to internalise these qualities, and collective identity is seen as a unified, singular experience for the group as a whole.

The dominant constructivist approach has come under fire for ignoring the importance of essentialist notions of identity. In this regard, Lawrence Grossberg emphasises that the distinction between essentialist and anti-essentialist identities, as described by Hall, is not a theoretical but a strategic and historical distinction (1997) (1990).

The idea of essentialised identity, which Pan-Pacific and Pan-Pasifika identities exemplify, is also a powerful tool for identity creation that allows for political and social mobilisation. In Pasifika theatre I expect that Pan-Pasifika identities mobilise audiences and practitioners, and therefore are important to Pasifika theatre's development.

Essentialised identities play an important role in post-colonial literature and thinking (S. Hall, 2003). Oppressive powers impaired cultural identity by 'eradicating, bastardizing or marginalizing it to the point of impotence', but whereas in some societies people had lost connections with their traditions, in others cultural identity became a form of resistance (Crow & Banfield, 1996, p. 6; Soyinka, 1993). In post-colonial societies, the rediscovery of identities and histories became a powerful pursuit which Franz Fanon describes as passionate research, directed by 'the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others' (Fanon, 1985 p.109). Passionate research is defined as a search for a positive past by returning to one's roots, but in the process, history and untouched pre-colonial pasts are idealised. Research, as described by Fanon, investigates the effects of the colonial experience, looking for the lost, pure and authentic, and constructing essential identities through the discourse of an expedition or discovery. Reimagining these lost histories is one goal of the postcolonial project, and it goes hand in hand with what Hall called 'imaginary reunification', meaning reconstructing of the unity of the colonised (1996, p. 222). Through finding lost histories and unity, the postcolonial project provides alternative histories and empowerment, and the colonised subject find sources of resistance and authenticity. While it is acknowledged that Pasifika theatre practitioners reach back to traditions, something largely overlooked by literature is the role of imaginary reunification in the construction of Pan-Pasifika identities and in Pasifika theatre (C. B Balme & Carstensen, 2001; Keown, 2007).

## **2.4 Pasifika identities**

### **2.4.1 Traditional Pacific identities**

The literature on indigenous Pacific identities focused on spirituality, holism, and creation stories and stories of origin. These descriptions simplified Pacific identities whilst referring to life in the Pacific as idealised and unchanging. Identities are derived from collectivist cultures where the individual is inseparable from the collective, and thus they are connected to locality and genealogy (Figiel, 1996; Howard, 1990; Triandis, 1995). Recent literature, however, takes issue with readings that position indigenous cultures outside history, fossilised and fixed (S. Hall, 2000; Hokowhitu, 2008). As a result descriptions of Pacific identities shifted from fixed and essentialised to changing, performative and situated (P. Brown & Joanne, 2007; Fuss, 1989; Holland, Skinner, & Lachiotte, 1998).

### **2.4.2 Post-migration identities**

Much of Pasifika theatre focused on post-migration identities, in particular on second- and third-generation migrants' identities. Post-migration identities are related to the experience of racism, as Fleras and Spoonley describe in their book on ethnic relations in New Zealand. Racism toward non-European migrants was rife prior to World War II, and when Pasifika people began to arrive after the War, they encountered large-scale discrimination and racism (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999). Even in the 1990s, Pasifika people were still looked at as immigrants and overstayers, even though they became integral parts of society (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999, p. 190).

Recent literature emphasises that Pasifika people became integral parts of society, acquired citizenship, as well as New Zealand culture and lifestyle. Fleras identifies demographic changes as strongly connected to the development of Pacific identities in New Zealand. As the number of migrants declined, Pasifika people born in New Zealand outnumbered Pasifika people migrants. In the 1980s, for example, the number of New Zealand-born Samoans surpassed the number of first-Samoan migrants (Fleras, 1999). Diasporic New Zealand populations are often larger than the population remaining in the country of origin; examples include the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau. In addition, from the early 1990s there was a rapid growth of Pasifika people (1991-1996: 21%) (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999). Pasifika communities changed as New Zealand-born Pasifika people began to dominate (*ibid*). Many second-generation Pasifika people faced the dilemma between having an identity constructed by others and imposed on them, and creating a new context-dependent identity (Keddell, 2000). As traditional Pacific values and cultural base weakened, new identities reflected the on-going acculturation of Pasifika people (Health, 1997; Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2008). Acculturation can be defined as the way new migrants adopt the culture of the host country.

Acculturation can have several styles,<sup>6</sup> for example integration and assimilation, but in this study the umbrella term has sufficient explanatory power (Gans, 1997). In the new environment traditional constructs of identity were sometimes resisted, and as a result new identities were created, such as variants of fa'a Samoa, the Samoan way, fa'a Aukilani, fa'a Niu Sila, which represent the New Zealand and Auckland–Samoan ways (Macpherson, 1997). For example many Samoan women feel that fa'a Samoa, the Samoan way, is a burden and unsuitable to their lives in New Zealand (Tupuola, 1998b). Essentialised identities such as Samoanness also emerged, which unify and mobilise a large number of people (Macpherson, 1999). A new 'tagata Pacifica' started to evolve simultaneously as new multiple ethnicities developed, such as Fijian-Samoan-New Zealander (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999).

Layered and multiple Pasifika identities have become more frequent through intermarriages between different ethnicities in New Zealand. These identities are situational and have multiple ethnic loyalties (Fleras, 1999). At the same time, individuals often feel divided between their multiple identities (Tupuola, 1998a). Performing one's identity also becomes problematic, as performing or even explaining it to others is often burdened by negative stereotypes (Dunlop & Makisi, 2003; Tupuola, 1998a).

Analysis of Pasifika identities reveals the ways Pasifika people position themselves. Pasifika people changed position, from being immigrants, visitors, and overstayers to being New Zealanders. At the same time access and connections to Pasifika people's cultural heritage declined. Language is one of the visible markers of change and loss. Language loss was attributed to scarce materials, and weakening of Pasifika youth's cultural identity, cultural values and their perceived acceptance of their Pasifika ethnic group (Mila-Schaaf, 2010). As a result of loss and acculturation, Pasifika people's lifestyle, knowledge, and definitions of their identities, such Pasifika, Samoan, and Tongan, changed.

Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop and Gabrielle Sisifo Makisi argue that non-Samoan Pasifika people also describe themselves as three times marginalised: marginalised by the New Zealand dominant culture, by the Samoan community, the biggest Pasifika community in New Zealand, and by their families as well. This resembles earlier generations' experiences, who felt they are living on the margins because they were neither Maori nor European (Dunlop & Makisi, 2003). All in all, new Pasifika identities signal a move from the Pan-Pacific approach to appreciating the diversity of experiences, cultures, languages, and ethnicities.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, assimilation means fully adopting the new culture, and integration focuses on preserving some characteristics of the original culture while adapting to the host. In addition, individualised can get marginalised or separated, depending on their relation to old and new cultures (J. W. Berry, 1998; J. W. Berry, 2001)

### **2.4.3 Pacific diaspora and diasporic identities**

As diasporic centres accumulated more demographic and economic significance than the countries of origin, the Pacific diaspora received increasing attention in scholarship (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999 p. 191).

Scholarship highlighted the role of Pasifika people within diverse 'transnational networks', which Nicholas Van Hear defined as communities with significant linkages between the place of origin and the diasporic place of residence (Van Hear, 1998). Paul Spickard and Peggy Levitt describe diasporas as powerful transnational networks that connect individuals, families and communities, both culturally and economically regardless of reasons or conditions of migrations (Levitt, 2001; Spickard et al., 2002). James Clifford's analysis characterised diasporas in terms of hybridity, borders, travel, and transculturation (Clifford, 2004). The Pacific diaspora is identified as an example for imagined community (Fleras&Spoonley, 1991). In line with Anderson's theory on imagined communities, consequent diasporic identities are thus described as originating from the idea of a constructed community adapted to fulfil specific social and political goals (Anderson, 1991). Ethnicity itself is seen to regulate collective responses, control, and resources for members of the community.

In a more global context, Pasifika people are parts of transnational networks and Auckland is the largest Pacific city in the world in size and in maturation (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999). Mobile diasporas and continuous, albeit weakening, links between communities ensures that these transnational communities are not isolated (Spickard et al., 2002; Tupuola, 1998a). Communication technologies and internet strengthened the links between communities and Spoonley points out that the Pacific diaspora in New Zealand draws on networks in the areas of 'human and capital resources, food and fashion, with consequences for the re-imagining of community' (Spoonley, 2003, p. 1). However, Sau-Ling Wong in his discussion of the Chinese diaspora in the US points out that the diasporic/transnational focus of migration studies often neglects second and third-generation immigrants, class, representation and empowerment (2009). Attention paid to the Pacific diaspora also tends to focus on first wave immigrants only.

Pacific diasporas' relation to art and entertainment is understudied and there is no information available on how Pasifika theatre practitioners and entertainers from New Zealand connect with other parts of the diaspora in terms of touring and audience. This thesis brings some of these issues into the limelight.

### **2.5 Representation of Pasifika people and Pan-Pacific ideologies**

Research from the perspective of the colonisers rendered Pasifika people as 'Others', which was followed by the commodification of Western perceptions of the Pacific, including Pacific culture. Examples for such research range from Margareth Mead's (1929) *Coming of Age in Samoa* to the Gauguinian objectification of women. The dominant model was the quest for the savage, primitive, pure, natural, undiscovered and lost

Pacific. Pacific thus became an exotic blur, with little distinction between ethnicities, cultures, and people. Film and television presented Pacific Islanders in a similar fashion (Edmond, 1997; Edmond & Smith, 2003; Hereniko, 1999; Keown, 2007; Lyons, 2006; Snelling, 1998; Tavares, 2002). New Zealand plays in the 1970s and 1980s portrayed Pasifika people as naïve Pacific savages, and Pasifika theatre practitioners argued that to break away from such colonial stereotyping was one of the reasons why Pasifika theatre started.

### **2.5.1 Diversity and Pan-Pacific models**

Pan-Pacific ideologies emerged as a response to colonisation and the dominance of Western epistemologies, and they became tools for mobilisation and criticism. Hau'ofa and Wendt, two of the most prominent thinkers on the Pacific, discussed the ethics of research and the importance of diversity, and spoke up against exploitation and homogenisation. From the 1970s, Hau'ofa and Wendt drew attention to post-colonial, social, political, and economic tensions and promoted a new discourse of Oceania that made use of Pan-Pacific solidarity. Visions of the Pacific in art and literature range from that of the colonial gaze, the Pan-Pacific dream, and the realization of the post-colonial context, agenda, and diversity. One characteristic of the post-colonial Pan-Pacific discourse is to incorporate Pacific worldviews in research, and to reclaim and re-imagine a history of Pacific peoples from an indigenous perspective.

'The Pacific way', a Pan-Pacific ideology, became prominent in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pan-Pacific ideologies theorised a homogenous and isolated pre-colonial Oceania (Edmond, 1990). Hau'ofa (1998) saw a regional Pacific and a Pan-Pacific identity as potentially positive tools for an albeit loosely defined mobilisation, but rejected the homogenising implications of the term:

Our diversity is necessary for the struggle against the homogenizing forces of the global juggernaut. It is even more necessary for those of us who must focus on strengthening their ancestral cultures in their struggles against seemingly overwhelming forces, to regain their lost sovereignty. The regional identity that I am concerned with is something additional to other identities that we already have, or will develop in the future, something that should serve to enrich our other selves. (Eveli Hau'ofa, 1998, p. 393)

This pan-ethnicity model focuses on the experience and perception of the people in their destination countries, and on the experiences of the subsequent generations. In order to mobilise large number of people, artists, and activists, Pan-Pacific models disregard places of origin and shift the focus to a grand Pacific narrative (Spickard, 1992). Cluny Macpherson and Richard Bedford point out that Pan-Pacific views express syncretic identities:

[They are] not Niuean or Cook Island but 'Pacific'. 'PI' identities are expressed in new syncretic music as for instance in the music of Te Vaka, in performance art as for instance Pacific Underground, in patois and language registers, which mark a commitment to belonging in new clothing and building design (Macpherson & Bedford, in Spickard p.19)

Art and culture are seen to represent a Pan-Pacific rather than culture specific ideology in post-migration Pasifika populations. The two views on Oceania, one from the 'outside' and the other from the 'inside', share the picture of a homogenised Oceania, although from different ideological reasons. The inside view advocates a Pan-Pacific view to mobilise resources, while the outside view is a remnant of the generalising gaze of colonisers.

Wendt points out that 'the Pacific way' disregards discrimination and exploitation between ethnic groups (Wendt, 1976). He calls for a Pan-Pacific post-colonial movement across the Pacific, yet emphasises the diversity of Oceania and the diversity of art that springs from it. 'The work is rooted in the culture the artist is from, but in a very individualistic manner. Some are quite political, not necessarily overt. They are redefining who we are, also showing where the art of our countries may be going' (Hereniko, 2006, p. 61). Hau'ofa also advocates that the post-colonial experience is heterogeneous, and warns against the homogenising tendencies of Pan Pacific ideology, that is he warns against overlooking the diversity of Pacific cultures. In the *Tales of the Tikong* he focuses on the Bible and the Pacific, and theorises that Western cultures' influences on indigenous cultures resulted in a multicultural paradigm (1988). He then describes the making of the 'Others' as cultural commodities. This commodification and creating of the Other has not been explored in the literature on Pasifika theatre, but because other post-colonial theatres are inherently social and political, it is likely that Pasifika theatre promotes similar social and political goals. Therefore, this study explores the ways Pasifika theatre and theatre makers resist the processes of Othering and homogenisation.

Although both Wendt and Hau'ofa call for recognition of diversity, in practice Pasifika people's diversity was not emphasised. The localised version of Pan-Pacific identity, Pan-Pasifika identity, is common in New Zealand, as names such as PI, Pacific Islanders, and Islanders indicate. Pan-Pasifika ideology is prominent in Pasifika theatre, but research literature does not discuss it in detail.

### **2.5.2 Self-determination and art**

Albert Wendt sees self-determination of Pasifika people as a resistance against the effects of colonisation. One of Wendt's main objectives throughout his writing is reconstruction of history. Wendt emphasises that creating Pacific literature can highlight the effects of colonialism and empower the Pacific to claim its own identities. Pacific literature, especially in the early years, had a strong social and political agenda of realising and countering the effects of colonisation, and, as Wendt points out, Pacific literature should be read in the context of the immediacy of colonialism (Wendt & Hereniko, 1993). Wendt explains that 'creating our own literature helps us define ourselves in our own terms', and thus Pacific art becomes a post-colonial project of self-determination, redefinition and rediscovery of the histories, cultures and identities of Pasifika people

(Sharrad, 2003). However, Wilson and Hereniko emphasise that there is no such thing as the pure Pacific, as Pacific literatures are essentially a hybrid created from indigenous traditions, legacies of colonisation, and influences of globalisation (Hereniko & Wilson, 1999). Whether Pasifika theatre is such a form of self-determination has not been established in literature and therefore this study investigates it further.

## 2.6 'All the world is a stage': performative aspect of identities

In contemporary academic literature the meaning of performance expanded from only performing arts to a range of other human activities. The following section briefly outlines the relevant literature on the performative aspects of identity and their relevance to the study of Pasifika theatre.

Performance theory, founded by Schechner and Turner, considers events as performances, behaviours as 'twice-behaved' and thus performative (Schechner, 1985, 2006; Victor Turner & Schechner, 1986).

Performance's traditional narrow meaning according to Schechner embraces a broad spectrum of human activities:

Performance must be constructed as a 'broad spectrum' or 'continuum' of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainment the performing arts, and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race and class roles and on to healing, the media, and the internet (Schechner, 2006, p. 2).

Performance frames and analyses culture and events, and therefore it is a tool to analyse and understand human behaviour. It does not simply acknowledge events as performative, but it tries to explore how social agents reinforce rules of the discourse.

Erving Goffman describes everyday activities as performative where the individual becomes an actor, playing a role in the presence of an audience (1990). When an individual chooses to perform a character, the individual uses personal 'fronts' such as age, gender, ethnicity, and looks. Identities, according to Goffman, are dramatised and performed roles adjusted according to one's fronts, aims, and surroundings. Goffman's thinking on identity is paralleled in this quote in Shakespeare's comedy, *As you like it* (Shakespeare, 1968).

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players:  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts  
(Shakespeare, 1968, p. 7)

When interacting with others individuals analyse their situations and play a consequent role, similar to performing on a stage (Macionis, 2007). During such interactions, individuals assess how they want to be seen and perform their identity accordingly. These performances of identity can happen live, in visual or

written form, and even online (Kelley, 2007). Similar to the format of a 'play in a play', they can happen in and around performance and theatre, as defined traditionally. Theatre makers negotiate their identities through performance of the self, both in theatre and in their public lives. Accordingly, this study explores how identities are constructed according to individual, artistic, and political aims, to a certain audience.

The performative turn, described above, affects how this study looks at identity construction in two ways. In the traditional sense, theatre, as a performing art, offers space to express how identity is constructed. In addition, according to Goffman's definition, interviews with theatre makers, the audience's reactions, and appearances in media are 'performances'. According to Judith Butler 'identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results' (Butler, 1990, p. 25). Therefore, these 'performances' by are expressions and constructions of identity. Theatre makers' reflections on their background, the theatre making process, materials and audience, and their work, as well on society and the theatre industry are also part of the performative construction process.

## **2.7 Post-colonial theatre**

Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins in their book on postcolonial drama emphasise that theatre is not only entertainment, but in the context of former colonisation relationships it is inherently political because it resists 'imperialism and its effects' (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996, p. 1). Pasifika theatre in New Zealand is described as postcolonial, especially regarding its form (C.B Balme, 2007; C. B Balme & Carstensen, 2001; Houlahan, 2009; Keown, 2007; McGregor, 2004; Warrington, 2009). This section outlines the importance and description of post-colonialism, and then discusses the main characteristics of postcolonial theatre and their relevance to the study.

### **2.7.1 Post-colonialism: mimicry, the voice of the subaltern and hybridity**

Post-colonialism does not describe a temporal concept, referring to 'post', after colonialism but rather 'an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures, and hierarchies' (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996, p. 2). Post-modernism and post-colonialism often seemingly overlap, but post-modernism breaks down the aesthetic, including traditional genres, authority, and value, while post-colonialism aims to break down the hegemonic boundaries and power imbalances that result in othering (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2006). Colonisation affected the minds, society, and art of those colonised. The colonised developed various forms of resistance as a reaction to these processes. Fanon explains that feelings of inferiority result in imitation and appropriation of the culture of the colonisers. The colonised often imitated the coloniser's language, lifestyle and art, and even their status symbols (Fanon, 1970 ). This imitation is closely linked to the notion of mimicry, which Homi Bhabha describes as a two-sided tool that on the one hand relies on the



codes and practices of the colonisers and on the other hand it criticises and resists colonial powers (Bhabha, 1994b).

According to Said, if the voice of the colonised is represented, the power balance can be brought closer to equilibrium. Said in *Orientalism* points out that Western scholarship is often considered superior to works of the Other (Said, 2003). How the voice of the Other can be heard became one of the central questions of post-colonialism. Gayatri C. Spivak examines the voice of Other in terms of the role of the subaltern (Spivak & Morris, 2010). She points out that the subaltern's voices should be represented without essentialisation of voices of the subaltern. Spivak and Fanon explain the paradox regarding the voice of the subaltern: it is rarely the poorest and most exploited that express the relationship to the colonising powers; instead it is the educated and relatively privileged who have the opportunity to be heard (1970 ; Spivak & Morris, 2010). Spivak suggests strategic essentialism, which allows for speaking on behalf of a group while making one's identity clear. Western research often exoticised and othered Pasifika people, and as a result European researchers are increasingly cautious about issues of representation and ethics.

Colonial powers directly or indirectly prevented indigenous writers from developing their own voices. The effect was mimicry or silence, as pointed out by Fanon (1970), Bhabha (1994), and Spivak (2010). Gradually, indigenous writers developed their own ways of expressing themselves, reshaped the language and form of expression, and made it their own. Post-colonial literature allows these voices to become a form of cultural criticism that intends to 'dis-identify' societies from the dominant, hegemonic cultural codes and their production (Slemon & Tiffin, 1989). Theatre, according to Gilbert and Tompkins, can have the same goal as literature, but because it is live it interferes in the public organisation, and therefore its criticism of structures can have more extensive effects than literature (1996). Bhabha points out that indigenous art separates dominant and marginalised discourses and knowledges. He calls for a space of hybridity, where through mixing of knowledges and discourses writers challenge colonialism and its effects (Bhabha, 1994a). The discourse of hybridity emphasises the need for combining epistemologies and method so that a variety of voices and different experiences can be heard. Sharp adds that colonialism affects different places and people differently and to a different extent, which indigenous literature and its criticism should not overlook (2009).

'Liminality' originates in the anthropological tradition. It was coined by Arnold van Gennep to describe rites of passages that alter one's standing in society. Such rites of passages were considered liminal stages where one does not belong to the previous nor the coming stage (Gennep, 1960). Turner expanded the meaning of liminality from 'liminal' rites of passages and in-between periods to understanding human reactions and 'liminoid' experiences, characteristic to the post-industrial era. Liminoid experiences were less ritualised as

they focused on how individuals bring forth transformation in a playful and performative manner (V Turner, 1982). For Turner, liminality shaped personality, and people were agents. He also expanded Genep's definition of liminality from small societies to individuals, groups, and societies (V Turner, 1967, 1974). It was at this time that definitions of liminality have been stretched. Szokolczai and Turner argued that liminality can be permanent (Szokolczai, 2000; Thomassen, 2006). Liminality was also linked to mimicry, as at uncertain, in-between times agents looked for people they can mimic, suggesting the example of Hitler's followers (Szokolczai, 2009). When post-colonial theory took up the concept, the meaning of liminality already ranged from individuals to societies, and its timespan ranged from momentary in-betweenness to permanent liminal states. Bhabha used liminality to describe colonial societies where identities of colonisers and colonised are constructed and performed through difference. The liminal space is a hybrid space, which presupposes the existence of the Other, and negotiates cultural identity traditions, including gender, class, and ethnicity. Bhabha describes the liminal space as 'in-between, the designations of identity, becomes a process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that connects the space between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and tither of a stairwell, the temporal movement that it allows, prevents identities to sink into their primordial polarities' (Bhabha, 1994a, p. 8). This definition of liminality offers opportunity for mimicry and it has a potential to disrupt existing social hierarchies. In the New Zealand context Linda T. Smith describes the liminal as a meeting place that carries the potential for ceremony, which she illustrates through a Maori welcome: when Maori welcome their guests, the space between the two parties becomes a ceremonial space, which gives an opportunity to acknowledge the Other (Smith, 2010). In the context of migration, liminality is used to describe migration and multiethnic individuals. A notable example is border theory, coined by Gloria E. Anzaldúa. Border theory describes a liminal space between cultures, that separates and connects in the context of United States migration (Anzaldúa, 1987; McCammon & Anne Ryan, 2006; Niday & Allender, 2000). Even in Van Genep's and Turner's descriptions of rituals, performances of rituals are inherently equipped with a liminal element. Turners' notion of social drama, the redressive phase, where a redressive action can consist of acts ranging from personal advice to legal action, is fundamentally liminal, a 'no-mans-land betwixt-and-between the structural past and structural future as anticipated by society' (Victor Turner & Schechner, 1986, p. 65). In this sense Grotowski's 'poor theatre', Brook's 'total theatre', and Barba's 'transcendent theatre' are liminal experiences because performances shift spectators' and performers' actions and consciousness (Yarrow & Chamberlain, 2007). One tradition of looking at the liminal grew out of the literary tradition and explored drama and scripts as liminal (Bruster & Weimann, 2004). Another tradition in performance studies further loosened the concept when, taking Turner's notion of liminal Schechner introduced the notion of 'efficacy', characterised by performance rituals as liminal experiences (Schechner, 1974). McKenzie criticised

performance studies for stretching the boundaries of the concept and overusing it to describe non-conservative performances as well as the discipline's own position (McKenzie, 2001). While such criticism may seem extreme, liminality was used in performance studies in a wide range of contexts from understanding being a professor, traumas of survival, and funeral rites (Dominguez, 2012; Fisher, 2011; Ukaegbu, 2011). Thus while liminality became an increasingly diverse concept, for the purpose of this study Bhabha's definition, which compares liminality to a stairwell, is used.

### 2.7.2 Postcolonial theatre

During colonialism, indigenous art forms were marginalised and Western art forms were favoured. European settlers, when they established a new colony did not only bring their belongings but their culture and religion as well, and theatre was often one of the first markers of so-called civilisation. Gilbert and Tomkins point out that as a result, indigenous performance forms were pushed into the background, and although they were probably happening underground, they were not visible (1996). The history of theatre that was recorded from this time was of the settlers, reproduced in 'imperial style, theme and content' because those writing the record were the settlers themselves (ibid p.8).

Postcolonial theatre's goal, similar to that of post-colonial literature, is beyond the aesthetic, and has a strong transformative agenda. Postcolonial theatre, described by Femi Osofisan, Nigerian playwright, is the capacity to give hope to the powerless.

Against the inert silence which autocrats  
Seek to impose upon their subjects,  
The dissenting artist can triumph through the  
Gift of metaphor and magic, parody and  
Parable, masking and mimicry

(Osofisan, 1998, p. 11)

Scholarly literature on post-colonial theatre is relatively limited to four monographs and a growing number of articles. The four monographs which comprise the skeleton of the discussion below are: *An introduction to post-colonial theatre* by Crow & Banfield; *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* by Gilbert and Tomkins; *Postcolonial plays: an anthology* by Gilbert, and *Decolonizing the stage: theatrical syncretism and post-colonial drama* by Balme. These works are in agreement that discussions on postcolonial evolve around language, revisiting histories, shaping theatre as an art form and social and political goals (C. B Balme, 1999; Crow & Banfield, 1996; Gilbert, 2001; Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996).

### 2.7.3 Language as resistance in post-colonial theatre

Choosing a language has both ideological and practical implications in post-colonial theatre, because it is often situated in a bi-or multilingual environment. Christopher Balme argues that language is a marker of colonial authority, and it is strongly linked with 'the speaker's sense of autonomy and dignity' (C. B Balme, 1999; Crow & Banfield, 1996; Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996, p. 165). Language is not only a tool for communication but it contains 'systems of values –its suppositions, its geography, its concept of history, of difference its myriad gradations of distinction – becomes the systems upon which social, economic and political discourses are grounded' (Ashcroft et al., 2006, p. 283).

Language is a site of resistance to imperialism (C. B Balme, 1999; Crow & Banfield, 1996; Gilbert; Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996). Language as a central element of resistance dates back to the time of colonisation, as evidence suggests that indigenous literature was used to resist and criticise the colonisers (Crow & Banfield, 1996). English, or other languages of the colonisers, carried negative connotations and were seen a marker of the colonising powers (Crow & Banfield, 1996, p. 7). While languages continue to evolve as sites of resistance in the post-colonial era, it is still debated whether English or indigenous languages are more appropriate. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Nigerian playwright, sees English as a non-artistic language and therefore creates in his indigenous language (Pozo & thiong'o, 2004). Soyinka, Nigerian writer, and Derek Walcott, Saint Lucian poet and Nobel Prize winner, use the language of the colonisers but promote formal experimentation to draw attention to their postcolonial agenda.

Using indigenous languages is political because it constitutes a refusal to 'submit to the dominance of the imposed standard language and so subscribe to the reality it contains' (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996, p. 169). Practitioners who create in their indigenous languages resist the coloniser's language and more importantly, they resist the coloniser's worldview. Indigenous languages can evoke memories and history even, if the audience does not speak the language well, which is especially prominent in Maori theatre (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996, p. 171). Language choice, however, is not purely ideological: choosing a language is choosing an audience. Marginalised languages become less marginalised if they are used to produce knowledge, argues Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Thiong'o, 1998). Using an indigenous language creates and reveals a divide between 'white viewers and native performers', in which power dynamics are temporarily reversed and native audience and performers have power through their knowledge and understanding (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996, p. 170). English and other languages of the colonial powers in many countries are more common and therefore they allow the work to reach a wider audience (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996). Thus, a paradox is that while indigenous languages empower communities, they also restrict audiences.

Language choice among migrant populations, especially for those with a colonial past, is also a political decision. Migrant experiences are often entwined with being surrounded by a language that is different from one's own (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996). Post-colonial and migrant experiences are similar because there is dominant language that is different from migrants' languages. Life is lived and negotiated in the overlap of these two languages, which Gilbert and Tompkins compare to a double vision according to which a speaker can perform his identity conscious of his language choices because he sees himself both from the outside and the inside (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996, p. 250).

Pasifika theatre has not not used Pacific languages to a great extent, but Anton Carter, former member of Pacific Underground and Strategic adviser on Pacific art for Creative New Zealand, observed that it is a growing trend to do so. (Carter, 2002). I expect that practitioners consider Pacific languages important and attribute diversity of Pacific languages, Pasifika people's loss of Pacific languages, and European audience as factors that complicate use of Pacific languages in theatre.

#### **2.7.4 'Returning to the roots': essentialising and rewriting histories**

'Returning to the roots' is a debated essentialising movement, that emphasises works' and people's essential Indianness, Samoanness, or Africanness. It can be considered a cultural return, which as part of the post-colonial project aims to transformation power relations and indigenous communities, and open up questions about history and identity. It is a source and tool of self-determination and post-colonial resistance because its goal is to find, or rather to create, a unified culture, history, feeling of belonging, and community (Crow & Banfield, 1996). Such movements are criticised by Said, who argues that the underlying essentialised idea, 'nativism', is often used, constructed, and distributed by those in power (Said, 1993). 'Nativism' is characterised by descriptions and assumptions about indigenous history created with a political and ideological agenda, often using myths, rituals, legends, making a sharp distinction between colonisation's history and the 'pure' essentialised history of pre-colonial times (Crow & Banfield, 1996). Nativism received further criticism because it overlooks the diversity of indigenous populations and cultures and languages, and because it fails to incorporate gender, class, ethnic, and historic differences and tensions (Crow & Banfield, 1996).

In theatre, 'returning to the roots' helps to reclaim histories and mobilise communities. Western makers of history often overlooked unwritten indigenous myths, legends, histories, and performance traditions. Rewriting history with alternative indigenous performance methods and forms challenges 'the implicit representational biases of Western theatre' (Gilbert, 2001, p. 1). Post-colonial theatre revisits, rewrites, and performs alternative and 'lost' histories to construct a unified, essentialised indigenous identity and history

(Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996, p. 107). 'Returning to the roots' in post-colonial theatre also received criticism because it is prone to homogenisation, which leads to loss of diversity (Boire, 1990).

Pan-Pacific ideas and reconstruction of history, discussed before, are forms of 'returning to the roots' that influenced Pacific art. This study examines an essentialising trend in Pasifika theatre and I hypothesise that after an initial homogenising trend, Pasifika theatre reflects the diversity of Pasifika theatre practitioners.

#### **2.7.4.1 Traditions**

Traditions, closely linked to identity, may also be studied as selected and constructed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in *The Invention of Tradition* proposed that traditions and rituals are not seamlessly passed down from one generation to the next, but are reshaped to suit the current socio-political agenda (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992, p. 1).

Invented traditions emerge in period of rapid social change; traditions can be either new or re-invented by recycling or reviving old traditions. In agreement, Barre Toelken points out that tradition is not stable, but is constructed through the twin laws of folklore, the dichotomies of continuity and discontinuity and stability and dynamism (Toelken, 1996). Handler and Linnekin emphasise active (traditor) and passive bearers of traditions who (re-)interpret the past and select elements of it to create traditions (1989). Traditors actively perform and pass on traditional behaviours, while passive bearers know the traditions but do not actively perform or pass them on. Passive bearers participate in the behaviours performed and initiated by the traditors, thus perpetuating the invented tradition. Theatre can be considered such an external process of discussion and reflection. There has been no exploration of how Pasifika theatre uses and reinvents traditions. This thesis aims to question whether Pasifika theatre practitioners are traditors in their theatre making.

#### **2.7.5 Art forms in postcolonial theatre**

Oral traditions played a significant part in indigenous cultures, which Western research often disregarded. However, tunes, songs, and other performance traditions often survived colonisation (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996, p. 170). Post-colonial theatre makers often reach back to oral traditions and challenge the written word's dominance (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996, p. 167). During colonisation culturally specific theatre was not rejected but colonisers overlooked some conventions while favoured others, which were still regarded as inferior to Western theatre forms (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996). Yet, colonisers were fascinated by indigenous forms of performance, which they saw as pure and authentic. Indigenous performances often changed to conform to Western audience and culture. A very good example of this is Indian dance. In some parts of India female dancers could creatively express their sexuality before colonisation, but after the introduction

of Christian values such performance received negative audience reactions, as the educated middle class found the exposing of the female body promiscuous and indecent. Only recently, however, Indian female dancers started to reclaim their corporeality and sexuality in their performances (Mitra, 2006).

Post-colonial theatre is often modelled closely on Western theatre, and it often incorporates the Western canon of literature (C. B Balme, 1999). Stories from the Bible and Shakespeare plays are popular sources of adaptation, because Shakespeare's work is often seen as a living symbol of English authority and cultural superiority due to his popularity and place in curricula (J. Singh, 1989). Using works of the Western canon is a legacy of colonial education. Their appropriation however is also a form of resistance (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996). Helen Tiffin in her analysis of canonical counter discourse explains that reworking these European classics gives them local relevance. At the same time, the adaptations question authenticity and authority of the universalised discourse of colonialism (1987).

#### **2.7.5.1 Syncretism, contamination and hybrid forms**

Brian Crow and Chris Banfield argue that for the postcolonial theatre maker 'theatre' carries meanings and characteristics both of indigenous and Western performance, because during colonialism Western traditions and indigenous art forms were performed simultaneously. Balme described theatrical syncretism as a combination of Western notions of theatre and indigenous performance. Syncretism mixes originally culturally heterogeneous signs, codes, and styles (C. B Balme, 1999). In syncretic works, indigenous influences often contrast with Western theatre forms, and thus reveal some of the artistic limitations of Western theatre conventions, such as Western realist theatre's limited use of space, often rigid form, and separation of audience and performers. Reaching back to indigenous art forms is artistic experimentation and a political statement, part of the postcolonial project (Crow & Banfield, 1996, p. 11).

Mixing of traditional forms with inherited ideas of Western theatre enables new fusions and meetings of realities (Crow & Banfield, 1996). The incorporation of rituals in theatre transcend to what Schechner and Turner describe as the realm of efficacy, because theatre gains a ritual function that connects to ancestral histories and ancestors (Schechner, 2006, p. 71). Soyinka, who advocates using traditional art forms, points out that through the ritual function of indigenous art, drama becomes a space where the world of ancestors, the living, and future generations connect (Soyinka, 1976).

Syncretism often creates theatre removed from realist theatre traditions and thus expands one's view on what theatre is (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996). This 'contamination', as Diana Brydon points out, is positive rather than negative and creates hybrid forms of theatre (1991). Such hybrid forms are marked by the continuing influence of the colonisers, since, as Bhabha argues, 'the effects of colonial power is seen to be

the production of hybridisation rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions' (Bhabha, 1985, p. 154). However, the forms are also marked by indigenous traditions that re-shape the boundaries of Western theatre practices. The way and degree to which indigenous elements are incorporated varies, with different levels of fusion of the two or more performing art systems.

#### **2.7.5.2 Intercultural theatre**

Syncretic theatre is not limited to post-colonial theatre; Western theatre makers also use elements from different culture's performing arts traditions. Some of the most famous examples are Peter Brook's use of Indian theatre and Ariane Mnouchkine's incorporation of Japanese theatre in their performances. The difference between postcolonial and Western syncretism lies in the agenda rather than the theatre making process (C. B Balme, 1999). Western theatre makers start with Western theatre traditions and incorporate the culturally 'Other' to revitalise Western theatre aesthetics. In contrast, post-colonial theatre makers use indigenous elements as forms of post-colonial resistance, to reconstruct, re-imagine, and revitalise their own culture and history. Thus, post-colonial theatre's syncretism is political as well as aesthetic.

Brook's and Mnouchkine's work can also be seen in the light of intercultural theatre. Patrice Pavis described intercultural theatre as fusion caused by borrowing from different cultures (Pavis, 1992, p. 1). Intercultural theatre practices have received significant attention and criticism from theatre makers since the 1970s. Western theatre makers created intercultural theatre with different methods to push the boundaries of Western theatre aesthetic. Brook's aim is create a theatre that transcends cultural boundaries and expectations of cultures, while Jerzy Grotowski draws on ritual techniques across cultures (1976; Heilpern, 1999; Moffitt, 2000). Rustom Bharucha, however, criticises both Brook and Grotowski, because he argues that their Eurocentric approaches enable the continuation of a power imbalance between the West and the Rest (Bharucha, 1993). Bharucha advocates that power dynamics should be equalised and argues that 'if inter-culturalism is born through the meeting of the self and the 'other', the real challenge is to maintain the reciprocity of this dynamic' (Bharucha, 1993, p. 155). Other theatre makers, such as Eugenio Barba, who coined the term theatre anthropology, avoid increasingly politicised culture and embark on a quest for the pre-cultural that looks for the physical dimensions of the performer (Watson, 1993).

The debate on intercultural theatre unfolds in the Richard Schechner's reaction to Bharucha's article *A collision of cultures: Some Western interpretations of Indian theatre* (Bharucha, 1984), and Bharucha's reply to Schechner. Schechner wrote that 'I do see great benefits in trying any number of ways to grasp traditional forms— both within and outside of ones 'home culture' (Schechner, 1984, p. 248). Bharucha, however, considers this approach disrespectful, and contends that interculturalism has to be 'confronted within the



particularities of the specific historical condition' and warns against transportation of rituals (Bharucha, 1984, p. 255 ). Approaches that try to mitigate the power balance in New Zealand intercultural theatre include the Third Space approach, which emphasises that Maori materials should be treated with respect (Greenwood & Wilson, 2006). As a response to the criticism that state that Western theatre disrespects locality and meaning of rituals, Schechner argues that culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century became increasingly global, and as a result of the post-colonial condition there is no such thing as untainted culture.

### **2.7.5.3 Political and social function of post-colonial theatre**

Indigenous art is inherently political, as Bhabha notes, one of the main purposes of post-colonial arts is to decolonise the space it is created in (C. B Balme, 1999; Bhabha, 1985). Indigenous art has to be political because imperialism's effect is all-pervasive, and Said argues that imperialism's legacy effects politics and the way one experiences the world (Said, 1993). Post-colonial theatre is a theatrical and performative response to imperialism that constructs, performs, and claims identities, and it is a source of cultural redefinition and revival (Crow & Banfield, 1996). Postcolonial theatre is inseparable from the 'imagining, living, and negotiating social reality based on the notions of democracy, cultural pluralism and social justice' (Amka, 2004, p. xii). In Africa, postcolonial performance is not limited to the stage but it is lived through dance, carnival, and everyday life and thus it is understood as part of the inter-modernist project (Amka, 2004).

### **2.7.5.4 Theories of power**

Power is inseparable from the post-colonial condition. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theories of power diversified. Michel Foucault argues that power is dispersed and all-encompassing, and it is inseparable from knowledge:

Power is everywhere. Not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And 'Power,' insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement [...] power is not an institution, and not a structure, neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with, it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (Foucault, 1990, p. 93).

'Power is everywhere', argues Foucault who sees subjects as constituted through power, a constitution process to which they themselves contribute with their actions (Foucault, 1990, p. 93). Foucault's work is criticised on the basis that it ignores domination, lacks specificity in the description of mechanisms of power, and lacks normative standards (N. Fraser, 1989; Hartsock, 1990). Yet, many contemporary theories of power rely on Foucault's work. Post-Marxist thinkers, including Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe,

incorporate Foucault's work, and expand the creation of hegemony from class to other factors including gender, ethnicity, and identity.

Another trend is to move away from Foucauldian thought on power and highlight the importance of agency, which post-structuralist thinkers like Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu do. The 'agency' tradition grew out of the work of theorists like Steven Lukes, who proposes that power can be viewed from three dimensions. A one-dimensional view on power focuses on evident examples of power, the two-dimensional power looks at overt and covert examples of power. As a criticism of the two views, Lukes identifies a three-dimensional view on power, which included influences through values and norms, all social interactions and behaviours that are often performed routinely (Lukes, 2004, p. 28).

Is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial? (Lukes, 2004, p. 28)

Lukes, in the new edition of his original work points out that three-dimensional power focuses on power as domination, rather than as an influence on society as a whole. Giddens follows the agency tradition but proposes that while people are free to act, they unknowingly recreate power structures. He notes transformative capacity and domination as qualities of power. Agents, according to Giddens, use 'resources' to exert influence: 'resources. [...] are structured properties of social systems, drawn on and reproduced by knowledgeable agents in the course of interaction' (Giddens, 1984 p.15). He rejects Lukes' statement that power and interest are linked. Giddens' theory of power, in turn, is criticised for its lack of practicality by Bourdieu, because it is difficult to implement it into real world case studies. Bourdieu defines cultural capital as a means for non-economic hierarchy, where groups distinguish themselves by taste. He defines symbolic power as: 'the power which the person submitting to grants the person who exercises it, a credit which he credits him' (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991, p. 194). Bourdieu also identifies 'misrecognition', in many ways similar to false consciousness, and 'symbolic power is based upon "social taxonomies" which subaltern groups "misrecognise" as legitimate by failing to see them as arbitrary constructions serving dominant class interest' (Gledhill, 2000, p. 144). In this study, I expected that participants would express views on power that corresponded to different theories.

#### **2.7.6 Female playwrights**

Visual markers of identity, such as gender, are 'significant in theatrical contexts even if connotations are instable' (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996, p. 205). Race and gender are not 'just' biological facts, but they are context dependent and are constructed both by ideology and history. Post-colonial women's theatre is

twice the site of resistance because of the performers' minority/ colonised status and their gender (Griffin, 2006; Menon, 2006). Female theatre makers draw attention to a range of issues including the experience of being bi-racial, problems of representation and redistribution, and the trans-nationality and multicultural nature of living in a post-colonial society (Boucher, 2006; Griffin, 2006; Petropoulos, 2006). Through using Western theatre and culture in their work, female playwrights protest against being Othered and negotiate their identities (Griffin, 2006; Petropoulos, 2006). They also negotiate tradition and the effects of colonisation, for instance Indian dancers pushing the boundaries of dance by expressing their sexuality, violating Christian morals that became prevalent during colonisation (Mitra, 2006). Women's performances in male dominated theatre industries in India, Pakistan or Canada for these reasons are described as especially important (Mitra, 2006; Petropoulos, 2006; L. Singh, 2006). However, female playwrights are still underrepresented in post-colonial theatre, including Pasifika theatre (Crow & Banfield, 1996, p. 17). The growing number of female theatre makers in Pasifika theatre is identified as a trend by Carter, which this study explores more the trend more in depth incorporating female theatre makers' point of views (Carter, 2002).

## **2.8 Pasifika theatre**

In the light of the earlier theoretical framework, Pacific migration, debates on multiculturalism, theories of identity and literature on post-colonial theatre, scholarly literature on Pasifika theatre is discussed in the following section. A review of Maori theatre as a relevant indigenous minority theatre is followed by the literature on Pasifika theatre.

### **2.8.1 Maori theatre**

Maori theatre is closely linked to Pasifika theatre because of their parallel development, proposed solidarity, and both ethnic groups' minority status in New Zealand. The dominant trend in literature on Maori performance focuses on the connection between incorporation of traditional elements and the socio-political agenda of Maori performance. The revival of Maori performance and culture became widely visible in the 1970s. Both Maori and Pasifika performance in New Zealand expanded in the 1990s but Maori theatre's visibility dates earlier than that of Pasifika theatre. However, there is little written about the strong links and simultaneous development of Maori and Pasifika theatre. The following section outlines Maori theatre's development, incorporation of Maori elements into theatre and the popular culture's importance of in the expansion of Maori performance.

Maori plays in the 1970s often focused on colonial injustices against the Maori (Keown, 2007). These plays included *Te Raukura* written by Harry Dansey and *Death of the Land* by Rowley Habib (1975) (Dansey, 1974). As Hone Kouke points out, these plays were 'often pigeonholed as the political, the worthy, or the spiritual'

(Kouke, 1999, p. 9). Protest actions of the '70s and of the 1980s were reflected in Maori theatre's dramaturgy and in other aspects of performance, such as space, audience relations, language, and form (Greenwood, 2002). The 1970s was the 'beginning of the Maori renaissance and the beginning of Maori theatre' (McGregor, 2004, p. 65). Intercultural theatre performances were also performed more frequently. In the 1980s, Maori theatre became even more prominent. A new venue, The Depot Theatre, specialising on new New Zealand work including Maori and Pasifika plays, opened in 1983. In 1983, *Shuriken* by Vincent Q'Sullivan was presented with an intercultural cast. In the early 1980 the first Maori graduates from Toi Whakaari, the New Zealand Drama School, graduated and Te Ohu Whakaari and a Maori co-operative started touring in Maraes and schools. The focus of Maori theatre in the late 1980s shifted, and plays such as *Roimata* by Riwia Brown and *Once were warriors* drew attention to the life of urbanised Maori (R. Brown, 1991; Duff, 1990). By the mid-1980s, Maori performance became a significant part of the New Zealand cultural scene (McGregor, 2004). In the development of bicultural theatre, as Greenwood pointed out, 'it was Maori who took the initiative in theatre and in other arts in redefining and re-inscribing what it meant to live in New Zealand in the space between two cultures' (Greenwood, 2002, p. 29). Maori performance received significant attention, and its revival was more or less continuous, unlike that of Pasifika theatre, where after the revival of the 1990s, interest and productions decreased.

Jim Moriarty and Rangimoana Taylor developed the notion of the Marae theatre, based on the idea that some aspects of Maori performance, including pre-European Maori performance are theatrical, and can be organic parts of contemporary theatrical performances (Greenwood, 2002). According to Helen Gilbert, Marae theatre 'alters the status of the audience as silent observers who judge the performance, to that of participants in a ritual, collective experience' (Gilbert, 2001, p. 348). Marae ceremonies were incorporated into productions as frames and dramaturgy of the works (Keown, 2007). Examples for this are *The Return Home (Te Hokinga Mai)* (1988) and *Marae* (1992) by John Broughton. Similarly, Pasifika theatre practitioners also incorporated Pacific traditional elements in Pasifika theatre, which has received significant attention in the literature (C. B Balme, 1999). In an interview Nathaniel Lees, one of the first Pasifika theatre practitioners, emphasises the importance of Pasifika theatre's connection to Maori theatre and support within the community of Pasifika theatre practitioners (O'Donnell, 2007a).

## **2.8.2 Pasifika theatre: a review of literature**

There has been no comprehensive history of Pasifika theatre in New Zealand published to this date. This section reviews the literature published on Pasifika theatre, links it to previously discussed literature and identifies gaps in the writing on Pasifika theatre. Additional information on plays, locations, practitioners,

and theatre troops is summarised in Appendix 12- 15, to enable the reader to navigate with ease in the history of Pasifika theatre.

### **2.8.2.1 Pasifika theatre: postcolonial theatre**

Christopher Balme and Astrid Cartensen point out that ‘theatre created by Pacific Islanders is perhaps the most recent significant development in New Zealand theatre of the 1990s’ (C. B Balme & Carstensen, 2001, p. 35). They identify Pasifika theatre in New Zealand as ‘[works that] evince all the hallmarks of postcolonial theatre’ (C. B Balme & Carstensen, 2001, p. 35). They also point out that these works often transcend boundaries of theatre as an art form. By focusing on various theatre pieces, including *Think of a Garden* by John Kneubuhl, *Home fires*, a collaboration between Maori and Pasifika artists and *Tatau*, a collaboration between Pacific Underground and Zeal theatre, Pasifika theatre’s diversity and transformation is explored, and thematic and formal similarities and differences are emphasised. This analysis identifies a play of memory (*Think of a Garden*), and plays that explore the tensions between traditions and life in New Zealand. In her book on Pacific Island literature, Keown describes Maori authors as well as Pasifika theatre practitioners from a postcolonial and region specific perspective (2007, p. 102). She mentions Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel, and described one of the Pasifika plays, *Le Matau* in detail. Keown identifies post-colonial resistance and migration as characteristics of Pasifika theatre in New Zealand. However, these plays are from the beginnings of Pasifika theatre, and Keown does not follow up on later developments.

Mimicry and adaptations are key characteristics of postcolonial theatre identified in literature, which recognises that Shakespeare’s plays have been the source of most of these adaptations. Lisa Warrington in her writing on representations of *Hamlet* in New Zealand theatre discusses how localising Shakespeare, in terms of identity, culture, social, and racial issues can be problematic (Warrington, 2009). Toa Fraser’s *Bare* received special attention in literature as a play that re-appropriates Hamlet through the ‘traditionally marginalised voice’ of the Pasifika immigrant, and addresses ‘the notion that Hamlet resists post-colonial re-appropriation’ through a real portrayal of New Zealand life (Halba, 2008; Warrington, 2009, p. 307). Through the dominant post-colonial discourse in *Bare*, Shakespeare’s relevance, issues of race and ethnicity are explored. Warrington and David O’Donnell and Tweddle describe *Bare* as the first indigenised Shakespeare play (O’Donnell & Tweddle, 2003b; Warrington, 2009). Mark Houlahan discusses another Shakespeare adaptation, *Romeo and Tusi* by Pacific Underground, which addresses Maori-Samoan ethnic relations (Houlahan, 2009). Houlahan emphasises that Pacific Underground maintains a balance between traditional theatre going audience and ‘taking it to the people’ (2009, p. 281). *Romeo and Tusi* introduced theatre to a new audience by presenting a localised adaptation of a theatre classic. The author also notes that the play is post-colonial because the interplay between the original text and today’s society disrupts

the cultural hegemony of Shakespeare and the West. Paloma Fresno-Calleja (2010) describes *Last Virgin in Paradise*, by Vilsoni Hereniko and Teresia Teaiwa, and *Fresh Off the Boat*, co-written by Simon Small and Oscar Kightley, as post-colonial responses to traditional representations of Pasifika people. She argues that it is reverse mimicry, a post-colonial response, and that the play uses pre-colonial comic forms. Fresno-Calleja also emphasises that these performances play with the colonial and urban stereotypes, the *Last Virgin in Paradise* 'subverting the image of the South Seas Maiden', while *Fresh Off the Boat* plays on Europeans' anxiety based on the growing Pasifika population (2010, p. 174). As the authors do not aim to explore the controversial aspect of using Shakespeare, or the negative and positive connotations Pasifika theatre practitioners attach to these representations, this study explores some of these issues.

Reconstruction of the past and questioning history and authenticity through theatre is emphasised in the literature. Paul Millar explains that Pacific literature in general deals with effects of colonisation and racism, and deconstruction of the stereotypical and often objectified colonial view of the Pacific (Millar, 2002). The reconstruction of the past, lost histories and knowledges, the assumptions of a fragmented culture once traditional are also explored in contemporary Pacific literature and theatre. Balme in *Pacific Performances: theatricality and cross-cultural encounter in the South Seas* discusses the way that the Pacific's association remained strong during and after colonization, and literature continuously questions the line between authentic inauthentic, pure and constructed (2007). Focusing on the aesthetic transformations, effects of globalization and commercialization, he explores the ways Pacific performances incorporate the styles of colonisers, the traditional, and the globalised. In his case study on *The Naked Samoans*<sup>7</sup> he explores how traditional forms of clowning merge with comedy, and create a syncretic art form.

### **2.8.2.2 Theatre of stories and stories of the Pacific**

Anton Carter, former member of the theatre company Pacific Underground, wrote a brief history of Pasifika theatre in New Zealand (Carter, 2002). He identifies narrative as the most important aspect of Pasifika theatre and argues that stories express the unique place of Pasifika people. Carter adds that a significant part of these Pasifika plays is autobiographical or semi-autobiographical.

Migration stories are described as the dominant narratives in Pasifika theatre. They are connected with the discrepancy between expectations, in particular the contrast between migrant dream and post-migration reality (Kightley, 1997). O'Donnell emphasises that in contemporary Pasifika theatre the friction that follows migration due to the dichotomy between the old and new plays an important role (2007). Carter identifies themes of early plays as: migration, socio-cultural adjustment, cultural alienation, negotiation of identity,

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<sup>7</sup> The Naked Samoans is a Samoan comedy troupe.

conflict of values, ethnic relations, sexuality, differences between generations, growing up, and rites of passage in New Zealand. Nathaniel Lees in an interview with O'Donnell describes family as important to theatre, and in another article, O'Donnell emphasises the importance of family and racism as a theme (2007). (2007b).

### **2.8.2.3 Pacific elements**

Pacific traditions and cultural elements are stressed in scholarly literature. Carter names the use of characters from life, Pacific languages, symbols, places, cultural knowledge and values as the elements that make Pasifika theatre unique (2002). O'Donnell emphasises the importance of Fale'aitu, a form of Samoan clowning (2007b). Balme describes Pasifika theatre as syncretic, the use of fale'aitu is emphasised in these articles, but no other traditional influences are mentioned (2001). Fale'aitu's influence on Pasifika theatre is painted with wide strokes, and does not include specificities.

Closely linked to fale'aitu is the use of post-modern humour in Pasifika theatre. Millar emphasises that the post-modern use of humour, along with experimentation with the genre deconstructs the dominant European discourse and underlying racism (Millar, 2002). O'Donnell emphasises that Pasifika theatre is a unique form of migrant theatre, and humour is one of its main distinguishing characteristics (O'Donnell, 2007b). As a criticism to current literature, Lee Wallace points out that literature on Pasifika theatre is dominated by exoticisms, such as frequent references to fale'aitu, and ignores the influence of American comedy shows and the 'stand up' tradition, which to a large extent influences The Naked Samoan's cartoon series, *Bro'Town* x (Wallace, 2007). This statement is further explored in the study.

### **2.8.2.4 Pasifika theatre and the community: audience and representation**

Pasifika theatre's audience is not discussed except for one mention with regard to audience development. Carter identifies two ways Pasifika theatre engages a new audience (2002). First, educating existing audience involves sparking interest in theatre as a form of entertainment, as an accepted occupation, and a venue for exploring identity and stories. Secondly, developing new audiences happens through education and school tours. There have been a growing number of practitioners, and plays performed internationally show New Zealand from a Pasifika perspective. Carter also identifies the primary audience of Pasifika theatre as Pasifika communities (2002). However, there is no distinction made between the intended and the actual audience, therefore this study investigates Pasifika theatre's audience further.

Pasifika theatre is also linked to representation, visibility, role models, and reshaping stereotypes within the Pacific communities. Carter emphasises that the greater involvement of Pasifika practitioners in theatre results in changes in representation, and this helps to break down stereotypes (2002). In addition, Erolia

Ifopo (2002), former member of Pacific Underground, describes the characters she played throughout her career as an actress as the means by which she was able to challenge political and social behaviour toward Pasifika people, especially through challenging a stereotypes of Pasifika women. These issues identified by Carter and Ifopo highlight the importance of representation of communities behind Pasifika theatre.

#### **2.8.2.5 Pasifika theatre: opportunities in the art form**

Millar in his chapter on Pasifika literature, points out that much of Pasifika writing in New Zealand has been done for theatre (2002). As in Maori writing, the immediacy of theatre provides opportunities to explore Pasifika identities and links to oral traditions of the Pacific. Ifopo in her autobiographical performance account describes Pasifika theatre from the perspective of a theatre maker and of an s educator. She sees the importance of Pasifika theatre in challenging stereotypes, providing role models, and giving pride to the audience and students in their own culture and heritage, while expanding their cultural awareness at the same time. These accounts acknowledge the opportunities in theatre, and highlight the gap in literature that connects theories of theatre as an art form to community building and connecting audience members with their traditional performance background.

#### **2.8.2.6 Pasifika theatre: positioning of theatre and people**

In his presentation on *Naked Samoans*, David O'Donnell pointed out that Pasifika people's outsider status in the bicultural framework of New Zealand provides an opportunity for being 'edgy', especially compared to Maori theatre (O'Donnell, 2002). Pasifika theatre is led by Samoan voices, and explores tensions between ethnic groups in New Zealand including Maori, European, and Pasifika. Examples are the work of *The Naked Samoans* or *Romeo and Tusi*. Millar disagrees with the marginalised position of Pasifika theatre, and points out that Pasifika theatre has moved from the margins toward the centre in the New Zealand theatre scene (Millar, 2002). O'Donnell also describes a recent development: the dominance of Samoan theatre practitioners is challenged by success of theatre makers from other ethnicities like Toa Fraser (Fijian), Dianna Fuemana (Niuean) and Karl Kite-Rangi (Cook Islands). These writers' position Pasifika theatre outside of the bicultural framework of New Zealand and describe it as diversifying.

#### **2.8.3 Pasifika theatre and popular media**

Popular media, related to Pasifika theatre, is also identified as important in some writings. Hou-Fu Liu (Liu, 2005) points out that although Pasifika theatre grew in diversity and volume in the last thirty years, and became integral part of constructing New Zealand identities in theatre, television and movies were also part of this construction process. Pasifika television programmes and films often originate in theatre performances; they are regarded as post-colonial, diasporic, and syncretic. Films and television shows



reflect on immigrant experiences and life in New Zealand. *Bro'town*, a television cartoon series, which originates in performances by the Naked Samoans is described by Matthew Bannister (Bannister, 2008) as a postmodern, postcolonial show reflecting on ethnic tensions and the bicultural political discourse of New Zealand. He also points out that whereas academic reactions to the show were predominantly negative, the audience, especially youth, like it. He reflects on the rise of political correctness and ethnicity as dominant discourses in New Zealand, and exemplifies the show as a form of resistance. The reversal of these two discourses is exemplified in *Bro'town*, when minority groups, such as Pasifika people, exaggerate power as opposed to denying or criticizing it directly. Emma Earl identifies *Bro'Town* as a tool to empower Polynesian youth in New Zealand and points out that through advertising it both feeds and resists the dominant capitalist bicultural discourse (2006). Hence, the show became part of the 'ideological shift toward multiculturalism in Aotearoa/New Zealand without disrupting the dominant ideology of white, middle-class masculinity' (Earl, 2006, p. 3). However, it also promotes advertising, deriving from the dominant ideology's relation to capitalism. Sarina Pearson (2005) in her analysis of Pasifika television shows in New Zealand (*Tali's Angels*, *Milburn Place*, *Eaten Alive* and an episode of *Some Like It Hot*), draws attention to the satirical style of Pasifika television. She explores the cultural politics of diasporic Pasifika television, and emphasises that under the guise of humour, the shows in fact comment on cultural, social, and sexual discourses and are a form of resistance to the perception of Pasifika people in the dominant discourse.

### Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Western and Pasifika methodologies underpin a qualitative research design that relies predominantly on interviews, plays, performances and archives. These methods are ethnographically informed, and theory is developed using grounded methods.

The research question of the study is: 'how do Pasifika theatre practitioners perform and construct their cultural identities through theatre?' This question rests on the cluster of theories, outlined in the theoretical framework section, that explain identities as constructed and performed. The study aims to fill the gap in knowledge about Pasifika theatre, and contribute to theory on Pasifika identities. On a conceptual level, the research is based on a social constructivist worldview, which assumes that the world we see is shaped by social practices. Thaman, a Tongan poet, describes the way knowledge is constructed and borrowed, and conceptual frames change. The poem included below serves as a reminder that a constructivist worldview is a not concern exclusive to Western academic discourse, but one that individuals, in this case Pasifika people, wrestle with on a daily basis:

you say that you think  
therefore you are  
but thinking belongs  
in the depths of the earth  
we simply borrow  
what we need to know  
these island the sky  
the surrounding sea  
the trees the birds  
and all that are free  
the misty rain  
the surging river  
pools by the blowholes  
a hidden flower  
have their own thinking  
they are different frames  
of mind that cannot fit  
in a small selfish world  
(K. H. Thaman, 1999, p. 15)

### **3.1 Knowledge systems and epistemologies**

Epistemology explores 'how knowledge is acquired' and 'ways of knowing and learning' (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 5; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 13). Two epistemological perspectives are drawn upon below: Western epistemologies are dominant, but Pasifika methodologies also feature prominently.

This study uses a framework based on Western academic research design. In this thesis knowledge is understood as partial and situated, because the explanations are influenced by interactions, locality, and the researcher understandings.

#### **3.1.1 Qualitative method and grounded theory**

This research is situated in a constructivist paradigm, a coherent belief structure that describes reality as created through social practices, interaction, and experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, reality and knowledge are not seen in terms of truth and absolutes but rather as constructed, subjective, and experimental. In line with using constructivist theory, I am reluctant to use absolute terms such as 'theory' and 'facts', and use 'understandings', 'knowledges', and 'interpretations'.

A qualitative research design allows experiences, perspectives and stories to be explored through rich description, rather than by the quantification of characteristics. Qualitative research is often contrasted with hard sciences, which are embedded in a positivist truth-seeking paradigm.

Qualitative research is separated from quantitative research foregoing statistics and numbers. More importantly, it does not seek truth and objectivity. Instead, it aims to capture the individuals' point of view, and provide in-depth understandings. Denzin famously compared qualitative researchers to 'bricoleur artists' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6), because they work in multiple overlapping paradigms. The result of such research is 'fluid and interconnected images and representations'.

Qualitative research also acknowledges that understandings are temporary and situated, because they are dependent on the researcher, the framework used, the timing of research. It usually uses multiple methods to remain reliable. The qualitative methods used in this research include interviews, ethnographic rich descriptions, and archival materials.

In this study, I used grounded theory to create understandings about Pasifika theatre practitioners' work through interaction with participants (Glaser, 1978, p. 3; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; 2005, p. 279). Grounded theory's purpose is to develop understandings from data. Grounded theory also counts observations and thought processes as data, which in this study were recorded in journals and memos (see 3.3.9). The reflections are also useful to notice what participants avoid talking about in the interviews, or when they hesitate. One of my participants started sentences about Maori, but she did not finish them. I used her hesitation to express potentially negative

opinions about Maori as data, and it made me realise that Maori are a politicised and sensitive topic among some participants. In line with Strauss' instructions to his students, coding, theoretical sampling, and checking against context were significant part of this study (Legewie, 2004). Coding was important, because I did not start with hypothesis and understandings emerged from the codes. Grounded theory is problematic in that it lacks clear guidelines, and Charmaz (2011) proposes that grounded theory should be systematically incorporated in coding, theoretical sampling and theory construction. In line with Strauss' and Glaser's seminal works on grounded theory and Charmaz's criticism, constructivist grounded theory is incorporated in this research (Glaser, 1978, p. 3; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; 2005, p. 279).

I entered the field of enquiry with few pre-determined judgements, because of my outsider status. The participants' accounts surface but I acknowledge that the research is influenced by my history, knowledge, the research context, relationships with research participants, and field experiences. Throughout the research process I critically engaged with the academic literature in order to approach the research question from a diverse range of perspectives. I used coding to capture different types of information including facts, relationships of events, and theories. I also used mind maps, my version of Strauss' use of diagrams, and the writing process to analyse connections.

### **3.1.2 Pasifika methodologies**

Pasifika methodologies were used in line with guidelines for ethical research on indigenous people and in order to better understand Pasifika theatre. Pacific worldviews are diverse because they are influenced by a number of cultures, ethnicities, languages, and political intentions. Therefore their incorporation explores diversity, and the search for commonalities and differences deepen the understanding of Pasifika worldview. Before exploring the application of Pasifika methodologies in this research (see Table 1), a review of relevant literature is discussed.

Linda T. Smith has written about indigenous methodologies as crucial to 'an ethical and respectful approach' (Smith, 1999, p. 15). Academics in recent years have increasingly recognised Indigenous Pacific methodologies (Benseman, Coxon, Anderson, & Anae, 2006).

Bishop and Glynn discuss a shift in qualitative research practices that acknowledge 'the importance of meaning and interpretation of people's lives within their cultural context' (2003, p. 105). Albert Wendt, in his essay *Toward a New Oceania*, states that the Pacific values have to be incorporated in research, not only as good practice, but also to reclaim knowledge (Wendt, 1976). Hau'ofa draws attention to the importance of interpreting Oceania through indigenous, Pacific values, metaphors and concepts (Epeli Hau'ofa, 1975; Epeli Hau'ofa, 1994; Epeli Hau'ofa, 1998). Gegeo and Watson-

Gegeo also emphasise the importance of Pacific methodologies and local knowledges (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002). Hau'ofa, Wendt and Gegeo state that use of indigenous knowledges empower indigenous communities. Gegeo sees indigenous knowledges as alive and in constant change, and the research process should be '(re).theorising, (re).creating and (re).structuring [of] knowledge' (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002, p. 381). Thaman in turn describes using indigenous knowledges and epistemologies as part of decolonization in Oceania (H. K. Thaman, 2003).

Indigenous, local, and traditional methodologies were proven successful with Pasifika communities in a wide range of research areas, including health (McGrath & Ka'ili, 2010), and education (Benseman et al., 2006; Nakhid et al., 2007). In education research Pasifika protocols are not only considered culturally appropriate, but deemed to yield better results (M Anae, Anderson, Benseman, & Coxon, 2002; Benseman et al., 2006). McGrath and Ka'ili point out that it is 'important to find ways to apply key values and beliefs identified during the ethnographic phase of the study' in order to make sure that the deep structures of the cultures are reflected in the research (McGrath & Ka'ili, 2010, p. 20).

A Pasifika approach to research that uses Pasifika values, beliefs and practices was emphasised during the Regional Pacific Ethics of Knowledge Production Workshop in Apia (2007) (Du Plessis & Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2009). The workshop recommended the use of local knowledge, spirituality, participatory and community-based designs, languages, and belief systems (Du Plessis & Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2009, p. 112). Similarly to this study, the frameworks draw on Western methodologies and ethics of research, and utilise Pacific knowledge systems.

### **3.1.2.1 The practice: different approaches and guidelines**

There are a number of emergent Pasifika approaches to research methodology. The Talanoa approach (Row 1-2) is a source of social conversation, a positive state of connectedness, and of new information. It relies on subjectivity and oral communication (Vaiotele, 2006, p. 21). This approach aims to explore the meanings of events for participants, and allows power sharing between researcher and participant. Another Pasifika research design is Aua'ile galuega (Row 3), which means direct involvement (Nakhid et al., 2007). It was designed by a group of students to improve student engagement for Pasifika students at universities. The Pacific research protocols (Row 4), and Pacific Health Research protocols (Column 5) also emphasise the importance of Pasifika methodologies, and give practical advice on how to incorporate them in research. In the following table the above four main approaches to Pasifika research methodologies are summarised.

**Table 1: Overview of four main Pasifika research methodologies**

<p>Talanoa approach</p> <p>Main concepts</p> <p>(McGrath &amp; Ka'ili, 2010)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 'Alofa ('ofa): love, loyalty, obligation, generosity, hospitality, mutual assistance, and sacrifice</li> <li>▪ 'Faka'apa'apa' (fa'aaloalo): respect, researchers should be respectful toward values, individuals and the community</li> <li>▪ 'kainga/'aiga' ("extended family"): family, but it also relates to communities and organizations, such as church or school</li> <li>▪ 'Tapu': taboo, which has an important element in Pacific cultures. It refers to the sacred or forbidden.</li> <li>▪ 'Mana': power and strength. Mana is connected to tapu, and often to the supernatural. It features in genealogical accounts and legend that discuss cultural themes, including identities.</li> </ul>
<p>Talanoa approach</p> <p>Ethic and protocols</p> <p>(Vaiotele, 2006)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Anga lelei: tolerant, generous, kind and dignified. The researcher aims to understand the participants, and the participants' situation. He reciprocates without being offensive.</li> <li>▪ Mateuteu: well-prepared, hardworking, professional, culturally versed. Knowledge of the participants' background, including genealogy and social standing is important, and researchers should act accordingly based on the information. Materials should be prepared ahead.</li> <li>▪ Poto he Anga: knowing what to do and doing it well. Consultation and accountability are expected, and respect, confidentiality must be observed throughout the process.</li> <li>▪ Ofa Fe'unga: showing compassion, empathy, love. Researchers must maintain the integrity of the research and be mindful of their/its effect on participants.</li> </ul>
<p>Aua'II le galuega</p> <p>(Nakhid et al., 2007)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vaka' (canoe) metaphor: represents students' educational experiences. It includes direct communication between teachers and students, where students participate in</li> </ul>

	<p>designing, directing and carrying out their own research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participants' should engage and identify with the research. 'Fono conversations' resemble unstructured interviews; themes are brought up spontaneously during discussion rather than by the researcher.</li> </ul>
<p>Pacific research protocols For education (Benseman et al., 2006, p. 153), (M Anae et al., 2002)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Protocols should be included in research design, implementation, analysis, report writing and dissemination.</li> <li>▪ Objectives and processes of the research should have Pacific 'ownership'.</li> <li>▪ Pasifika input consultation and participation should be sought and used at all stages of the research.</li> <li>▪ The language barrier and cultural contexts must be considered.</li> <li>▪ European researchers should acknowledge cultural limitations, and work in culturally safe ways.</li> <li>▪ Safety and relevance should be monitored both by Pasifika senior researchers, and community-based interviewers.</li> <li>▪ Senior Pasifika researchers have overall responsibility for research interfaces with Pasifika participants.</li> </ul>
<p>Pacific Health Research guidelines (HRC, 2005)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pasifika research protocols should be used in all research on Pasifika people (HRC, 2005; Mila-Schaaf, 2009).</li> <li>▪ Pasifika worldviews should be used as a 'primary reference point' (HRC, 2005, p. 12).</li> <li>▪ Use of indigenous Pasifika knowledge systems with Western methodologies positions the research in a negotiated place space? (Mila-Schaaf, 2009).</li> <li>▪ Commonalities and differences are identified and then applied in research.</li> </ul>

In Samoan culture knowledge and history have traditionally been transmitted through oral traditions such as chants, songs, and tales (Tamasese, 2002). Whereas in the Western view, oral traditions are

often considered less important than written knowledge, in many indigenous cultures, including the Samoan, oral traditions are vital because they transmit systems of knowledges, such as navigation, geography, history, genealogy, names and titles, and rituals and chants. Oral traditions are also critical to the individual's and community's identity. Pacific peoples traditionally constructed their histories and knowledges through language and oral traditions.

### **3.1.2.2 Application in this research**

This section outlines the ways in which Pasifika methods were applied in the study. I asked Amosa Fa'afoi, a Pasifika elder, to be my advisor and to guide the research process. Semi-structured interviews are used because they allow storytelling. Cultural limitations, for instance due to my cultural background, were acknowledged, and safety and cultural sensitivity were stressed. Nonetheless, commonalities and differences were sought in the two knowledge systems. Balance was a leading principle throughout the research. I encouraged interviewees and advisors to ask questions and consulted the advisor about planning the research and acquiring cultural knowledge. In addition, participants had the opportunity to give feedback on passages where they featured and to comment on transcripts. Simultaneously, communication with participants was maintained throughout the process and follow-up comments are encouraged. Participants' engagement redressed the imbalance between researcher and participants.

## **3.2 Naming**

What's in a name? That which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet.

(Shakespeare & Loehlin, 2002)

'What's in a name?' asks Juliet in Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*. While the young lover believes that naming is irrelevant, the events reveal her mistake and result in her tragic death.

The terms, by which ethnic groups can be referred to, reflect the cultural and historical diversity of the region. 'Naming' is also highly politicised. Derogatory ethnic slurs, for instance are still used in everyday speech and can evoke feelings of prejudice and racism (Schneider, 2004, p. 250). Other terms that were used in political discourse carry ideological and historical baggage.

### **3.2.1 Pasifika people**

The subjects of this study are theatre makers, whose ancestors or themselves migrated from the Pacific Islands, where the Pacific Islands include islands in Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, to New Zealand. The names that refer to this group are problematic in two ways: historically-politically and in terms of diversity. The following section outlines the different ways the group described above is named. Then, the relevant terminology used in the thesis is explained.



The argument for Pan-Pasifika terms, like Pacific Peoples or Pasifika, is that they provide both unity and diversity. Pan-Pacific terms, like other Pan-ethnic terms encompass numerous ethnicities. Samu (2006) pointed out that Pan-Pacific terms are tools for mobilisation:

Sometimes the main advantage of a unifying concept is the countering effect it has against oppositional forces such as neo-colonialism — or for migrant community groups such as Pasifika in New Zealand, countering oppositional forces such as assimilation and social/economic/cultural marginalisation (*T. W. Samu, 2006, p. 7*)

The argument against pan-ethnic terms is that they homogenise, generalise, and mask diversity. While pan-ethnic terms are used in official discourse, the diversity is also acknowledged in the definitions. The Ministry for Pacific Islands Affairs (New Zealand) for instance promotes ‘the social, economic and cultural development of Pacific peoples in New Zealand’ (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2012). However, Pacific peoples is in plural, as an acknowledgement of the diversity of Pacific populations in New Zealand. The collective terms that have been used to describe the group defined above include ‘Pacific Islanders’, ‘PIs’, ‘Islander’, ‘Pasifika’ and ‘Pacific Peoples’, among others. While the Pan-Pasifika terms more or less refer to the same population, they carry different connotations.

The terms ‘Polynesian’, ‘Pacific Islanders’, ‘PIs’ and ‘Islander’ were used from the early years of migration. These names carry negative connotations by being associated with Othering, racism and the Dawn Raids era. ‘Polynesian’ for instance carries the legacy of colonialism (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001) and excludes those from Melanesia and Micronesia, even if those populations are small compared to migrants from Polynesia. Mara, Foliaki and Coxon (1994) criticised the term ‘Pacific Islander’, as it ‘*undermines the historical, social, political and cultural uniqueness of each Pacific Islands society*’ (Mara et al., 1994, p. 181). However, Hill pointed out that terms such as ‘*Pacific Islander (or variations, such as ‘PI’ or Islander)*’ were used and seen as meaningful in the past by members of the various communities, and remain so, and to invalidate them implies denying agency to those who employ them’ (Hill, 2010, p. 292). Liu, on the other hand remarked that these terms were accepted by first- and second-generation migrants between 1950 and 1980, who embraced Pan-Pasifika identities to a greater extent (Liu, 2005, p. 208). PI’s is another commonly used term, described by Fairbairn-Dunlop and Makisi (2003) as an abbreviation often with negative connotations. There was a shift from ‘Pacific Islanders’ to ‘Pacific People’, which (Macpherson, 2004) is a result of the negative connotations of the term Pacific Islander. ‘Pacific People’ in singular, nonetheless, still represent Pan-Pasifika ideologies.

The Ministry for Pacific Islands Affairs’ (2012) preferred terminology, since 1994, is ‘Pacific Peoples’. The ministry acknowledges that it is an umbrella term and it does not refer to a single ethnicity or

culture, yet it is considered as a move to embrace diversity from 'Pacific People' and Pan-Pasifika identities.

The Ministry of Education's preferred term is 'Pasifika', which only bears meaning in the New Zealand context. Stevenson points out that the term was first used to describe 'New Zealand-born Pacific Islanders' and Samu supported his statement: 'the fact that as a term, it 'originated' from us, is of no small consequence because being able to define ourselves is an issue of control' (*T. Wendt Samu, 1998, p. 209*). The term is associated with empowering 'marginalised groups', which Linda T Smith (1999) describes as tools for self-definition and self-identification (T. W. Samu, 2006). Stevenson also points out that the term 'speaks to the urban reality of Islanders and their attempts to balance the notions of identity and loss, migration and place' (Stevenson, 2004, p. 31). Samu (1998) suggests that 'Pasifika' or 'Tagata Pasifika' are appropriate terms, and she emphasises that these terms highlight the diversity of cultures and ethnicities. However, the term is criticised for its vagueness, and for marginalising smaller ethnic groups (like Tongan) (Manu'atu, 2000; T. Wendt Samu, 2007). The most recent development has been a push towards the use of indigenous terms (Macpherson, Spoonley, & Anae, 2001).

As a move away from Pan-Pasifika ideologies, ethnicity-specific terms (like Tongan, Samoan) are advocated, and Anae points out that they are bound to replace Pan-Pasifika identities (Melani Anae, 1998, p. 110). On the one hand, ethnicity-specific identities were seen as reflections of the maturing population (Melani Anae, 1998). Opposing this view, the argument is put forward that Maori and Polynesian youth constructs its identity through positive markers (Borrel, 2005), and that Pan-Pasifika identities in the contemporary context reflect the experiences of marginalisation (Borrel, 2005; Mok, 2000). Another criticism of the ethnicity-specific terminology is its lack of flexibility, as it does not extend to the growing number of mixed identities (Higgins & Leleisi'uao, 2009). However, Mok points out that Pan-Pasifika and ethnicity-specific identities can complement, rather than compete with each other (2000). Mila-Schaaf also adds that Pasifika carries positive connotations, because it has a 'stronger echo of social imagery and the way we imagine ourselves as an unified ethnic group here in Aotearoa' (Mila-Schaaf, 2010, p. 25).

During the interviews, the participants refer to themselves and their communities in different ways. This includes pan-ethnic terms like 'Polynesians', 'PI', 'brown people, Pacific Islanders. Participants also use ethnicity specific terms like Samoan, Tongan, and Fijian and referred to multiple ethnicities such as Samoan-Kiwi, Afakasi,<sup>8</sup> and 'half-cast'. The terms 'Pasifika' and 'Pacific Peoples' are rarely

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<sup>8</sup> An individual with Samoan and European heritage, typically one parent is Samoan, the other is European.

used. However, because of my position as an academic and non-Pasifika I could not use these terms, as they could have been potentially offensive to participants.

As the review above showed, naming is problematic. The terms referring to the group subject of this research are problematised by history, ideology, politics and multiple ethnicities. For the purpose of the research, a Pan-Pasifika term was chosen, as the study's aim is to include theatre makers from different and often mixed backgrounds, focusing on inclusion rather than exclusion. The names participants used often carry negative connotations, which, aware of my outsider status, I chose not to use. The aim of this choice is not to discredit the terminologies or make the research less reliable, but to stay politically correct and respectful towards participants. Having considered these similarities and differences between Pan-Pasifika terms, the final choice for the thesis was between 'Pacific Peoples' and 'Pasifika'. Both are umbrella terms and terms of convenience, yet emphasised it in their definitions. To some degree, they both aim to acknowledge diversity. Pasifika is chosen because it originates from the community itself, and it carries the connotations of empowerment and agency, unlike 'Pacific Peoples'. 'Pasifika' is also specific to the New Zealand context.

### **3.2.2 Generations**

The diversity of the Pasifika population in New Zealand lies not only in the variety of ethnicities and culture but, as Anae et.al pointed out, Pasifika people 'align themselves variously, and at different times, along ethnic, geographic, church, family, school, age/gender-based, youth/elders, island-born/ New Zealand-born, occupational lines, or a mix of these' (M. Anae & Uniservices, 2001, p. 6). As this research explores identities of Pasifika people, who create theatre in New Zealand, there is a variation in whether they are migrants of descendants of migrants, or whether they were born or raised in New Zealand. However, as differences between generations were established in the literature, and in their theatre making, for the analysis and development of further theories, differences between different generations of immigrants are noted throughout the thesis.

The term often used in New Zealand is New Zealand born, which draws attention to 'Pacific heritage and local New Zealand upbringing' (Macpherson et al., 2001, p. 75). The term, however is criticised for its negative connotations (Melani Anae, 1998; Tupuola, 1998a). Furthermore, for the purpose of this thesis, the term is not specific enough, as there is a need to distinguish between different generations of migrants and their descendants. Therefore, the terms first-, second- and third-generation Pasifika People are used throughout the thesis.

### **3.2.3 European, Pakeha, Pālangi, Pālagi, Papālagi**

The descendants of colonisers from Europe are called Pakeha in Maori, *Pālagi* or *Papālagi* in Samoan, and *Papālangi* in Tongan, and *Pālagi* in Niuean. These terms by definition refer to the outsiders in a general sense, but they are used to refer to those with European ancestry in the New Zealand context. Participants use the terms ‘Palangi’, ‘European’ and ‘Pakeha’ to refer to the descendants of colonisers from Europe living in New Zealand. Tcherkezoff (1999) points out that that the word ‘pre-dates Cook’s arrival and must have been coined when the inhabitants of the region saw Europeans for the first time’; and that interpretations as ‘sky-bursters’ are embedded in European cosmology rather than Polynesian beliefs (Tcherkezoff, 1999, p. 417). Statistics New Zealand, a government department, used the European or New Zealand European categories. For the purpose of the research, the term European is chosen as an umbrella term. Similarly to ‘Pasifika’ the diversity of the category is acknowledged.

### **3.2.4 Pasifika theatre practitioner**

Pasifika theatre practitioners are theatre makers who are involved in creative production or management of theatre and describe themselves as from a Pasifika background. The category encompasses a variety of ethnicities (Samoan, Tongan, and Fijian etc.) and professions, including playwrights, directors, actors and producers.

## **3.3 Data collection**

The following section outlines the data collection, and how diverse sources of data increased the reliability and credibility of the research.

A combination of method of data collection allows researchers to remain trustworthy, credible, and explore different angles, while the use of one research technology or only one kind of data can impose one perspective. Different method can reveal ‘different facets of the same symbolic reality, and every method is a different line of sight directed toward the same point, observing social and symbolic reality’ (Berg, 2007, p. 395).

Triangulation uses a variety of data sources in a single study to confirm measures and validate findings (Berg, 2007). Data triangulation uses the principle of checks and balances to increase validity of data (Denzin, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 17; Fielding & Fielding, 1986).

Richardson (1994) proposes crystallisation as an alternative to triangulation: ‘crystals grow, change, alter [...] crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract with themselves, creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in all different directions’ (Richardson, 2000: 934). Multiple sources of data and method are used to explore different perspectives, based on the assumption

that there is no single true perspective any research topic. The goal of crystallisation is to 'work between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 6). The exploration of different perspectives aligns with the constructivist paradigm and the research's objective. The following sections describe the multiple data collection method used in the research.

### **3.3.1 Pilot interviews and cultural advisor**

Initially 'pilot interviews' were conducted both with potential audience members and theatre practitioners to trial the research questions and themes, and to improve interviewing techniques. The pilot interviews followed the same ethical procedures, data recording techniques, and data analysis as later interviews.

A cultural advisor was approached and asked to give advice on wide ranges of topics, including pronunciation, protocols, and ethics. Amosa Fa'afoi, a lecturer at the University of Canterbury, became a mentor, as well as what Fontana and Frey termed as informant. A classic sociological informant would be someone who 'acts as a guide and translator of cultural mores' (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 707). However, Spivak criticises research and describes the 'native informant', as a person who 'feed(s) anthropology'. According to Spivak, the native informant is seen as blank, even though he generates text (Spivak, 1999, p. 142). In Maori and Pasifika methodologies the native informant is considered visible, and generates trustworthiness. Linda T Smith (1999) outlines a change in the informant's position within anthropology: previously, the relationship between researcher and informant was like 'trading the Other', and information and knowledge was often traded for material values. In some of the earliest research done in New Zealand, the researcher Eldson Best gave gifts to some of his informants and played on their friendship and trust to access their knowledge (Smith, 1999). In contemporary research, Best's practices would be considered unethical and unprofessional and in this research informants were treated fairly.

In her discussion on research about Maori, Linda T Smith (1989) explains personal development as a process in which the researchers becomes more familiar with Maori language, concerns, and culture. The researcher should also attend culturally appropriate events to become more culturally sensitive. She also advises consultation with Maori to seek support and consent. The informant in this research helped to contextualise the research and advised on Pasifika cultures and ethics. Throughout the process there were other, informal informants as well. Some examples for interaction with these informants were, for examples, invitations to the informants' church, chats about their lives over a coffee, and meeting at conferences. Often participants acted as informants by introducing me to new concepts and people.

### **3.3.2 General information on the data collection**

The majority of the data collection took place between 2009 November and 2011 February, but data was collected until the very end of the research (2012 April) to remain up to date. A timeline of the data collection can be found in Appendix 1. In total, 29 semi-structured interviews were used in the research, the majority of them collected between 2010 February and 2010 November (for list see Appendix 2). The majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in Christchurch, Wellington, or Auckland. There was also one email and two phone interviews. In addition, a dataset of approximately 3400 articles was put together, and an estimated 30 scripts (some final, some drafts) were accessed. Participant observations took place from 2009 August to 2010 December (see Appendix 3 for examples), and were documented in journals. Furthermore, plays and recordings were watched and analysed.

### **3.3.3 Archival research**

In the beginning archival research enabled the creation of a list of Pasifika theatre practitioners, companies and plays. Berg points out that archival research 'examine[s] and assess[es] human traces' (Berg, 2007, p. 239). In this study, widely accessible commercial media records, both written and visual material, including reviews, newspaper articles, interviews and recordings were collated. Initially I searched for the phrases 'Pasifika theatre', 'Pacific performance' and 'Pasifika performance'. In a second phase names of individual plays, movies and practitioners were searched. Cumulatively these searches resulted in a dataset consisting of 3400 articles. This dataset was accessed through a database throughout the research, primarily for background information. For this reason only a fraction of the articles is specifically mentioned in the thesis. I used search engines including Factiva and Index New Zealand. Articles that were not available online were accessed through the University of Canterbury's print holdings. I also watched current and archival broadcasts of television programmes, on Maori Television and Tagata Pasifika. I collated the 3400 entries into a database in Excel, which contained information of three types. Factual information about the articles such as title, year and author was supplemented by descriptive codes including date range, such as 1990s or before 1990, and names of individuals, plays, and companies the article mentioned. Preliminary analytic codes, such as identity, stereotype, audience, or power, collaboration, and quotes from the articles were also included.

At a later stage, I used more in-depth information including reviews, interviews and biographies as part of the analysis. These sources were used as part of the analysis. Information in articles was checked against other sources of data. There was little information available about older performances. Less known or less successful companies also got fewer reviews.

The reader of this thesis may notice that references to the articles are missing throughout the thesis and in the bibliography and the Excel database is not included as an Appendix. The reason for this significant gap is the unfortunate loss of the database and archive folder during the 2011 Christchurch earthquakes. After this loss, I made the decision not to start the 8 months long archival research again, but use the information available from my notes and preliminary writings for the history chapter, and research and quote the most important articles related to the thesis.

### **3.3.4 Interviews**

Interviews are compatible with a social constructivist framework because they seek in-depth information about social practices and experiences. Interviews can be defined as ‘conversations with a purpose’ (Berg, 2007, p. 89). In this research, interviews provided opportunities to learn through interaction, and to explore theatre practitioners’ different viewpoints.

Research that incorporates narratives is considered particularly useful with Pasifika people, because narratives and storytelling are at the heart of Pacific cultures, and are continuation of oral histories (Williams et. al, 2003). Wendt, Lees, and Carter emphasised that Pasifika people are ‘natural storytellers’ (WEN; LEE; CAR\_A). Smith also sees that storytelling is important in indigenous cultures because it invokes shared understandings and histories, and incorporates history, gossip, and creativity (Smith, 1999). Eastmond and Bishop argue that storytelling is a valuable and culturally sensitive way to represent the ‘diversities of truth’ (Bishop, 1996, p. 24). In addition, the power balance of the interaction shifts and the storyteller is more in control (1996; Eastmond, 2007, p. 261).

#### **3.3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews**

The interviews were semi-structured. The pre-set approach allowed participants to tell stories. It allowed me to guide the participants to tell narratives that were relevant to my research. The pilot interviews and the results of the archival research influenced the list of open-ended questions used (See Appendix 4). Open-ended questions allowed participants to tell their stories freely. The set of interview questions were augmented by probes and tangential questions, which allowed the participants to recount their experiences and give in-depth answers. Questions changed somewhat, because themes that came up frequently were incorporated into the set list of questions. Based on my list of these I asked practitioners about their work and experience in theatre and challenges and highlights in their career. I also asked questions about Pasifika identity and identity construction. Finally, they were encouraged to talk about available funding and work opportunities, and how they positioning work the theatre scene. Research participants were first asked to talk about their career,

which helped me to fill in gaps in the literature. Because my question was about participants' work in theatre they felt more at ease.

### **3.3.4.2 Participants**

Participant details were obtained through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method where existing participants help to recruit future participants from among their contacts. Thus, participant's group grows like a rolling snowball. The first interviews were with practitioners I already knew. These subjects in turn provided contact details of future participants. In addition to snowball sampling, I used theoretical sampling. Based on the archival research I had a list of practitioners who worked in Pasifika theatre. When I realised that I did not have enough emerging practitioners, I selected names based on the list and asked my existing participants to provide the contact details of these emerging playwrights. Additionally, those identified on the list were contacted, and new contacts met personally became participants. I recorded the evolving relationships and reflections on the interviewing process in my journal (for an example see Appendix 5).

Interview participants can be categorised as professionals representing an organisation (e.g. Creative New Zealand), professionals representing a theatre company (e.g. Auckland Theatre Company), and Pasifika theatre practitioners. Interviewees who fit in multiple categories were involved in various areas of the arts. In order to unfold the diversity of their experiences, I asked them to talk about different areas of their work.

Both Pasifika and non-Pasifika practitioners were interviewed. Non-Pasifika theatre practitioners were chosen based on their involvement in productions relevant to Pasifika theatre. Practitioners' specialisations were not part of the selection process because even though practitioners worked in different areas of theatre, including directing, acting, writing, and production, these areas of work often overlapped.

Participants were contacted by phone or email. They received an information letter (Appendix 6) outlining the study and they signed a consent form prior to the interview (Appendix 7). In the consent form participants indicated their awareness of the conditions of participation. On average Interviews lasted an hour to one and a half hours. The participants suggested locations of the interviews and therefore interviews were variously conducted in office spaces, cafes, homes and markets. I used 29 interviews in the thesis (Appendix 2).<sup>9</sup> Participants were asked for clarifications and feedback after they were sent transcripts, and parts of sections, as mentioned before. In some

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<sup>9</sup> Although the total number of interviews is larger than 29 due to earthquake damage some interviews and transcripts are lost. These are not included in the count or the thesis.



cases communication with participants continued after the interview for the purpose of clarification. Interviews used are listed in Appendix 2.1.

Participatory research received little methodological reflection (Gallacher, 2008). In this research a commitment was made to engage participants as recommended by Pasifika methodologies. In hindsight, the design was justified by helping to sustain a relationship with one participant, and valuable corrections (typos, additional information) were received from two participants. In contrast to the Wiles et.al.'s experiences the feedback was lower than expected. Wiles et.al. found that when participants took interest in participation they were likely to give feedback (Wiles, Charles, Crow, & Heath, 2006). Low response rate in this research may be explained by the use of email, a medium associated with high turnover of addresses, spam filters. Additionally, participants might have overlooked emails, and personal communication could have brought higher turnout. In addition participants may not have replied because, as they pointed out, they regard academic research irrelevant to their work. As one participant argued his audience will not read a PhD thesis.

#### **2.3.4.2 Reflections on the interview process**

It is important to discuss the positioning of the researcher, and to acknowledge that the results of the interviews are not objective, because interviewing is an 'active' rather than a neutral process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The interviewer is a person, located historically and contextually, she carries conscious and unconscious motives, desires, feelings, and biases (Scheurich, 1997).

Consequently, how a researcher presents herself is an important issue, said Fontana and Frey (Fontana & Frey, pp. Frey, 2000 #2088). Because participants had different culture, ethnicity and lived experiences to mine, I presented myself as a curious and open learner (Wax, 1960). By my learner position I acknowledged my outsider status in New Zealand, and resisted presenting myself as another 'white researcher' from a colonial culture. This also made it possible for me to see the situation from the participant's point of view, which helped to establish rapport with the subjects. As Fontana and Frey point out, establishing rapport with the participants is a not just a matter of relationships, but also of lenses: 'the researcher must be able to take the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their viewpoint rather than superimpose her world of academia and preconceptions to them' (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 708).

Prior to choosing interviewing as a method, numerous factors were identified that could potentially problematise data collection. One factor was that we live in an interview society (Silverman & Atkinson, 1997), which means that interviewing in a sense 'has become a routine technical practice and a pervasive, taken-for-granted activity in our culture' (Mishler, 1986, p. 23). In addition, as theatre practitioners, the participants were well versed in giving interviews. The differences

between practitioners reflected the discrepancy in their experience and motivations; for some popular practitioners it was one interview among many, while young practitioners wanted to become more visible.

Historically, research on Pasifika people tended to Other and exoticise Pasifika people, which, as discussed in the conceptual framework, resulted in a sense of distrust toward Western research. Research's bad reputation resulted in theatre practitioners refusing to participate: one practitioner in her response to my initial approach expressed appreciation for my effort to contact her, but was unwilling to participate due to previous negative experiences with research.

Interviews did not always provide accurate information. Participants acknowledged that some stories became inaccurate and were blurred in their memory. An unexpected issue was that face-to-face requests for interviews did not result in a better response rate than emails. While this contradicts general advice that interaction lead to positive responses, one of my informants explained that my ethnic background may be the reason for the response rates (Grbich, 1999; MacDougall & Fudge, 2001).

#### **3.3.4.3 Positioning: 'Your name sound Tongan, but you sure don't look Tongan'**

A respected academic, a European performance researcher, warned me against doing research on Pasifika theatre. She ended our conversation in the very first month of my PhD saying: 'You are mad and irresponsible studying Pasifika theatre, you do not belong to them' (Anonymous 5, 2009).

When I entered the field, I was repeatedly asked 'So where are you from?'. *Ignoring my identity could be detrimental to the study. As Biddy and Mohanty (Biddy & Chandra, 1988) explain:*

*The claim to a lack of identity or positionality is itself based on privilege, on a refusal to accept responsibility for one's implication in actual historical or social relations, on a denial that positionalities exists or that they matter, the denial of one's own personal history and the claim to a total separation from it (Biddy & Chandra, 1988, p. 208)*

I realised that my identity could be an asset, because it allowed me to be less judgemental. The fact that I had fewer preconceived notions about New Zealand and Pasifika people than insiders did helped me to gain participants' trust, and to approach the topic from an outsider perspective. I described my status as outsider<sup>2</sup>, as in [outsider \* outsider = outsider<sup>2</sup>], because I was an outsider to both the Pasifika community, and to New Zealand. The outsider<sup>2</sup> (= outsider \* outsider) position, however, did not influence the gaze that rendered me another white researcher, which some negative responses to a face-to-face approach indicated. An informant laughed and said that it is because my 'name sound Tongan, but [I] sure don't look Tongan' (Anonymous 4, 2010). However, my ethnicity was less important than my skin colour and position in academia. Being a researcher

was perhaps more important than my origin, because research was often not seen positively even by otherwise helpful participants: 'read what a PhD has to say. Write, interpret English, and interpret structure [on] what the community is about. They are not writing for my audience' (MAN). By the end of the process, I questioned whether ethnicity's particularities are of importance. I argue that when similarities in ethnicity exist, 'representing one's 'home' [as] located in complicated social and historical contexts' can extend to fieldwork (Henry, 2003, p. 232). However, when one is an outsider, like a Hungarian in New Zealand studying Pasifika theatre, particularities of ethnicity and where home is are less important than the outsider status. In the end, I realised that I am an outsider<sup>3</sup> (= outsider x outsider x outsider). I believe I eventually gained the trust and respect of my participants through perseverance, respect and my interest in Pasifika theatre. Nevertheless I found the negative views and mistrust toward academic research puzzling.

### **3.3.5 Plays and scripts**

Published and unpublished plays were analysed and compared other data sources. While the number of Pasifika plays published has significantly grown in the last decade, numerous scripts are still hard to source. Additionally, comedy scripts are not published. Therefore the work of numerous companies is unavailable in written form.

### **3.3.6 Performances and recordings**

I attended performances and events, and recorded my observations and reflections. I sought recordings for past events and events that I could not attend. O'Brien notes that recordings are essential to a vivid representation of theatre histories (O'Brien, 1996). Recordings were found in libraries, or provided by the artists themselves. In the case of the latter the artists granted permission to use recordings for the purpose of analysis but in the early years of Pasifika theatre, there were no recordings. Artists and companies were increasingly careful to grant access for more recent shows the justification being that they could not provide a copy, as they only had raw copies, or due to copyright issues. The general unwillingness to provide materials may have been due to copyright issues, but it could equally have been a sign of mistrust towards research, or practitioners could have lacked motivation to retrieve record from the company archives.

### **3.3.7 Field notes observations, events**

Non-theatrical events were also attended to gain a more ethnographically informed and in-depth knowledge of Pasifika performance and communities. Examples include church gatherings and the Pasifika Festival in Auckland.

I kept field notes during these observations, in total 350 pages. However, as you can see in the appendix (see: Appendix 1.5), they were inconsistent in density and style since they were often scribbled down in the dark, or in moving vehicles. Sanjek in his book on field notes explains that they aid the researcher 'who sits down to record and begin to make cultural sense of a busy day's impressions' (Sanjek, 1990, p. 63). Field notes and reflections are part of the data collection and analysis process. Goffman describes participant observation as '*subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation*' (Goffman, 1989, p. 125). Consequentially the purpose of field notes is to engage both with one's own experiences, and with the life of those studied (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Taking field notes allowed me find connections between events and the bigger picture, remember details and to remain reflexive.

### **3.3.8 Journals and reflections**

A reflexive research journal was kept on the research process, my positioning and my thought processes. In total I had twenty-six full page and over a hundred small journal entries (their length ranged from sentences to several paragraphs). Research journals are identified as useful tools in drawing attention to possible biases and prejudices because they reflect on emotions and thoughts in analysis, interpretation and portrayal (Holly & Altrichter, 2011, p. 47). The research journal included memos and mind maps, reflections on interviews, as well as an initial analysis.

## **3.4 Data analysis**

Analysis of data was an on-going part of the research. A characteristic of qualitative research is that it 'works up from the data' (Lyn Richards, 2009, p. 73), and it allows ideas to emerge from the data during the research process. Journals and the writing process were also part of analysis. The following section reveals the processes and considerations of data analysis, including presentation, processes of analysis, and making sense of the data.

### **3.4.1 Process of analysis**

I analysed data from the archival research, and created a factsheet, storyboard based on life stories of practitioners and companies, and interviews' narrative analysis for the historical overview. I continuously added new information to the archival dataset. The interviews revealed chronological order and trends, and combined with other sources of data they became the basis of the history chapter.

Theatre is unique and exciting because of its live nature. O'Brien argues that 'the task of talking about something that is best enacted seems peripheral to the seductive and engaging process of

making theatre' (O'Brien, 1996, p. 105). Consequently, a solution may be to transport the vivid 'liveness' into a coherent narrative that includes the plays, practitioners as well as the social context. The most obvious way was to incorporate performance in the research process as Denzin proposes (Denzin, 2010). However I felt that such 'creative analytic practices' would shift the focus from the development of Pasifika theatre to the researcher (Richardson, 2000, p. 929). A more factual and historical method was sought because my purpose was the first comprehensive history of Pasifika theatre.

For the other four analysis chapters the analysis reached beyond narratives. The data was first margin coded. Coding brought chunks of data together, and made the coded research more easily accessible (Huberman and Miles 2002). Codes also allowed for comparison, identification of patterns and combinations. Descriptive codes included topics and descriptive information on plays, names, descriptions, age, and affiliation. Topic and analytic codes generated categories, which then became guiding units for further analysis. Coding was done manually to achieve familiarity with the data, and because significant proportion of the archival materials was never digitalised. I used terms mentioned by the participants or writers themselves, for example 'reversed chameleon' or 'raise the brown man', as suggested by Richard (Lyn Richards, 1990). Themes were constructed from similarities and differences in the codes. My methodology allowed themes to develop over time, as they were identified. In the end, coding categories included a collection of subcategories, and memos and quotes were readily accessible for further analysis. The overarching categories included: audience, migration and identity, language, social and political goals, storytelling and clowning, and the position of Pasifika theatre.

After initial coding the coding categories were revisited, changed and the data was re-coded. Both I and, fellow PhD students who helped out checked categories for consistency and reliability. In further analysis of data I used codes and emerging categories and a created mind maps. The structure and headings evolved from these codes and mind maps; and to make sense of data mind maps, memos, and sources were connected the categories to theoretical concepts.

### **3.4.2 Making sense of data**

The results of the analysis were first checked against the research question. From the results explanations and understandings were created, consistent with the grounded theory approach. The understandings included analysis and description. At the same time, the explanations linked data to theories discussed in the theoretical framework.

### **3.5 Presenting the research**

Because there was no comprehensive history of Pasifika theatre I decided to report the findings first in a chronological history, and then in a number of thematic clusters. The headings throughout the result chapters are based on the themes that emerged from the analysis. A list of interviews can be found in Appendix 2. In the appendix, each interview is assigned a code consisting of the first three letters of the theatre practitioner's name, for example an interview with Albert Wendt is referenced as (WEN).<sup>10</sup> Practitioners who chose to be anonymous and declined to offer a pseudonym are referred to by 'ANO' followed by a numeral. I let my personal voice surface in the introduction, method and methodology, and conclusion chapters, because the thesis is my journey. The majority of the thesis, however, explores the topic driven by data analysis rather than personal reflections in order to answer the research question. In these sections the first person singular is used significantly less than in the three other chapters. Quotes that appear in the thesis were not edited to truthfully present participants' voices.

### **3.6 Ethics, confidentiality, anonymity and data handling**

#### **3.6.1 Ethics approval**

The research followed the guidelines of the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, and gained approval for data collection from this body in 2009 (Appendix 10). The work required commitment to ethical research, respect of participants, diversity and professionalism throughout the study.

##### **3.6.1.1 Reflection on Pasifika methodologies**

Different understandings of respect in Pasifika and Western methodologies complicated the research process. Respect, according to a Western worldview, includes ethics, confidentiality, and treating people like one want to be treated. Describing research on Maori, Linda T Smith said that 'every meeting, every activity, and every visit to a home requires energy, commitment and protocols of respect' (Smith, 1999, p. 140). Her guide, on how to be respectful follows Kaupapa Maori practices includes respecting people, not '[trampling] over the Mana of people', humbleness, cautiousness, being observant, generosity, and face to face interaction (Smith, 1999, p. 120). Respect, Aroha ki te tangata, according to Maori methodologies is 'allowing people to define their own space and to meet on their own terms' (Pipi et al., 2002, p. 5). In extreme cases researchers may have to withhold findings considered inappropriate by participants.

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<sup>10</sup> There are two cases where the two names are the same, in this case the first name of the practitioners is indicated eg. MUA\_T, MUA\_M.

Respect was also emphasised in the Pasifika methodologies. Guides used in this research included respect of values, individuals and the community, and behaviour appropriate to the participants' background. Other guiding principles were consultation, accountability, confidentiality, and acknowledgement of cultural limitations. Some of these guidelines are straightforward, but others rely on the researcher's perception. My main questions included: Is there space to criticise elders? Can the researcher, especially the European researcher, have a voice, or should the voice of the participants dominate the research?

My ethical dilemma was that while I wanted to respect Pasifika cultures and participants, my understanding of research is deeply rooted in the Western worldview. According to my worldview, research should go beyond description, and provide analysis and understanding of the world we live in. For example I needed to reassess the boundaries of respect and the wish to provide the fullest possible analysis of the data, when an elder expressed views that in the mainstream discourse would be considered highly racist and offensive, or when participants cursed. In the end I made the inclusion of the material dependent on how statements fit the research, and whether their views would add new information. The dilemmas on respect revealed that while Pasifika guidelines are clear about the importance of Pasifika methodologies, they should be more specific.

### **3.6.2 Confidentiality, anonymity and data handling**

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research. Participants had the choice to be anonymous and chose pseudonyms, or to retain their own names. Identities of those who chose anonymity were concealed and their anonymity was protected throughout the process. Anonymity was not chosen as a general principle because interviews did not include sensitive or personal information and practitioners' name and affiliation were important. Only three practitioners wanted to be anonymous. Preserving participants anonymity was described as problematic by other researchers, and concealing anonymous participants' identity was expected to be problematic in this research as well (Baez, 2002; Kelman, 1977; Spaniol, 1994; Tilley & Woodthorpe, 2011). Pasifika theatre practitioners are small group, and practitioners are familiar with each other's work. Participants' affiliation with theatre companies was essential information included in the thesis. While all other details were ignored, those familiar with the company may be able to guess the identity of the participants. Similarly to the experiences of Guenther (2009), who theorised that respondents may regret not opting to be anonymous, I worried that participants might regret their choice. Once I realised that contact in many cases diminished after the interviews, I often caught myself unconsciously wanting to ignore passages that were dangerous or

inappropriate. An entry from my journal portrays that passages were not excluded from the thesis by default.

He said 'Those bloody Samoans' [quote continues]. Is it really necessary to include the description of interethnic conflict? Cons: It only comes up in this passage, and I would have to name him. Pros: could be useful to demonstrate Samoan practitioners' in Pasifika theatre, other reactions. (Journal entry, 2010, December 20)

Pros and cons were considered and in the end, this quote was not included in this thesis because there were no other similar quotes. The final decision was based on rationality rather than speculation on ethics. I decided this because participants were professionals and had power of what they wanted to include.



## **Chapter 4: A history of Pasifika theatre**

This chapter tracks the development of Pasifika theatre. Pasifika theatre is still in development, therefore findings, especially about recent trends, are necessarily tentative. To describe the development I employ the image of a tree to depict four developmental stages: a seed sprouts in a rich soil. After an initial growth spurt, the first branches emerge. These later become great boughs. The first phase took place in a monocultural environment, and shared its initial energy with Maori theatre. In the second phase, Pasifika theatre broke away from Maori theatre as specifically Pasifika cultural issues were portrayed. In the third phase popular Pasifika theatre and of Pan-Pasifika ideology flourished. While in the first three stages there was a particular focus on migration, in the fourth stage a move toward contemporary issues may be observed, as present day Pasifika theatre explores the issues of gender, ethnicity and individuality. Pasifika Practitioners are increasingly aware that they have largely acculturated into New Zealand society and that they are less connected with their ethnic and cultural roots.

Professional Pasifika theatre emerged in the 1970s, and it has become more prominent since. Pasifika theatre's development is tied to the growth of Pasifika population and the increasing proportion of second- and third-generation Pasifika people.

### **4.1 The rich soil and the seed of Pasifika theatre**

#### **4.1.1 Pre-colonisation performance forms in the Pacific: oratory and fale'aitu**

Even before colonisation, the Pacific Islands had a flourishing performance scene, which included clowning, dance and oratory. Diana Looser (2011, p. 526) examines pre-colonial Pacific Island theatre, and points out that in Tahiti, performances ranged from impromptu enactments to formalised community events, and included a variety of performing arts, including dances, songs and comedy.

The traditions closest to theatre were storytelling and clowning. Oratory, a traditional form of storytelling, was used to pass down history, legends, values, and genealogies. In *Samoan Art and Artists*, Mallon (Mallon, 2002) points out that oratory was a living performing arts tradition. Oratory performances were rituals, entertainment, and social commentaries all at once. Pasifika theatre is often linked to traditional storytelling (C.B Balme, 2007; Carter, 2002; Millar, 2002). However, these accounts do not demonstrate how Pasifika theatre was influenced by oratory. The relationship between Pasifika theatre and oratory is explored in greater depth in Chapter 6.

Samoaan clowning traditions are clearly visible in Pasifika comedy. To better understand links between Pasifika theatre and fale'aitu, a brief summary of relevant clowning traditions follows. In the Pacific, clowning was traditionally verbal or physical, and it was often part of dance (Lal & Fortune, 2000). While there were two significant clowning traditions in Samoa, only one of them, fale'aitu, which means house of spirits, is associated with Pasifika theatre. The influential tradition is a satirical comedy performed by the fa'aluma (clown) for the community (V. N. Kneubuhl, 1987). This form of clowning is still alive, but while in the past it was performed only during village celebrations, today it may be performed in virtually any setting.

Spirits (aitu) are important in both clowning traditions. A fa'aluma could adopt the persona of a spirit (aitu) to entertain the fellow villagers. In fale'aitu spirits play a prominent role; when a spirit was thought to inhabit a place or an object performances were organised around it argues John Kneubuhl, Pacific playwright:

Traditionally, in the Samoan village, there was a fale, or house, set aside for the aitu, or spirit [...] [if] you're doing theatricals – dancing or singing perhaps – and you release that spirit into that house, that house becomes a fale aitu, or a house of that spirit. It is like uncorking a genie'. (J. Kneubuhl & Hereniko, 1993, p. 101)

Actors were exempt from any consequences of their actions during performance. Community members agreed that that the performers were influenced by spirits and this agreement removed pressure to stay politically correct from the performers.

Exemption from retribution was famously described by Bakhtin in his seminal work, *Rabelais and his world*, as a means through which society can be criticised on exceptional occasions (Bakhtin, 1968). During carnival in the middle ages, performers criticised dominant structures and expressed non-conformist opinions, without being held liable for their actions. Through the example of pre-Lenten festivities during the middle ages, Bakhtin demonstrated that carnival was a celebration that released tension from society. Since carnival was featured boisterous humour and parodies of authority figures, it allowed a temporary crossing of feudalism's rigid hierarchical boundaries. In a highly hierarchical society like feudalism, class distinctions were all pervasive. The crowning of a fool during carnival mocked and disturbed established hierarchies and resulted in symbolic and momentary equality. Criticism of authority figures and reversal of roles produced entertainment, and social and cultural transformation (Bakhtin, 1968; Burke, 1988; Lankauskas, 1994; Santino, 2011). Bakhtin's theory on the carnivalesque can be applied to Pacific societies, which were strictly hierarchical and close-knit communities (Poole, 1998). Fale'aitu, like carnival, spoke the unspeakable and addressed taboos and social issues. Fale'aitu raised issues without consequences for

performers, and it subverted social conventions and mediated tensions within the communities (Hereniko, 1995; McLaughlin & Braun, 1998; Sinavaiana, 1992).

Fale'aitu addressed social issues such as colonial oppression, gender, and domestic relations (Mageo, 1996). Fale'aitu often mocked gender, and women's changing status was a popular topic. Before colonisation, only high-ranking women were expected to keep their virginity until marriage, while women of lower social status could improve their social standing through extramarital affairs (and the resultant offspring) with high-ranking men. After the introduction of Christianity, premarital sexual relations were frowned upon (Mageo, 1996). Women also became part of the work force, often as schoolteachers, thereby gaining relative financial independence. As a response to these changes, fale'aitu performances where the wife could undermine the husband's authority became more frequent and men's declining status was portrayed through feminised male characters, or male actors in women's roles flirting and winking to the audience. Such performances of feminine men in fale'aitu took place front of the whole community.

#### **4.1.2 After colonisation**

Missionaries introduced Western theatre to Samoa and since the early years of the island's colonisation schoolchildren performed scenes from Bible (WEN). Looser (2011) presents evidence drawn from explorers' accounts that describes practices similar to theatre, thus proving that there was a pre-colonial theatrical tradition in the Pacific. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, theatre troupes toured in Samoa, and Wendt remembered that Samoans created their own troupes based on their experiences in theatre and Sunday school. These troupes, all-male or all-female, travelled through the island, and performed in the villages. An example of these early productions is a performance of *Anthony and Cleopatra* by Shakespeare, which was incidentally the first theatre production Wendt saw:

It was translated into Samoan language by one of Samoa's greatest song makers. [...] I think I was very young. I saw it in the village, they go from village to village and they put up this play for fundraising. They put up lights, in those days they were lanterns because there was no electricity, and they performed on the Maraes and people contributed money for the fundraising. (WEN)

Wendt's account reveals that performances were spectacular community events that combined Western and Samoan traditions, as the troupes performed Western plays but in intervals there was traditional dance and music.

#### **4.1.3 Pacific art before the 1980s**

Before 1976, when Wendt published his ground breaking article, *Toward a New Oceania*, few people spoke about for the need for a new Pacific literature (Wendt, 1976). Wendt was one of the first

authors who called for mobilisation of artists and audience to create art that unites Pacific people in their search for their heritage and social political change. His views influenced Pacific art and growing number of artists increasingly reached back to their heritage after the 1970s. Some of the first prominent Pasifika theatre practitioners, Nathaniel Lees and Ole Mavaega, emerged at the end of the 1970s. Pasifika art forms (including literature and theatre) gained some visibility in the early 1980s. The first professional Pasifika theatre companies were established in the early 1980s<sup>11</sup>. As there are no public records available on Pasifika theatre before the early-1980s, anecdotal evidence and practitioners' memories are the only source for this part of Pasifika theatre history. The early plays and performances were inseparable from political and social changes and simultaneous growth of Maori theatre, discussed in Chapter 2 in detail.

### **A generational gap theory**

I propose that the acculturation of second-generation Pasifika people into New Zealand culture was pivotal for the emergence of Pasifika theatre. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the majority of Pasifika population were first-generation immigrants who worked in factories or in domestic roles. Lees describes early immigrants' children as the 'lost generation', because they often had little connection to their cultural heritage (O'Donnell, 2007). Many parents chose not to teach their native language to their children in order to ease entry into society; in many cases parents came to rely on their fluent, English-speaking offspring. Pasifika people born in New Zealand in the 1970s and those who grew up in New Zealand acculturated more thoroughly than first wave immigrants. Through education in the New Zealand school system, they became familiar with theatre, performance, and acting. Simultaneously, New Zealand popular media influenced the new generation's views on society, art, and film and theatre. The gap between the two generations' lifestyle, education, and opportunities explains why theatre making a viable opportunity for the younger generation.

#### **4.2 Years of sprouting: challenging mono-culturalism and breaking the ice**

This section explores the early years of Pasifika theatre, the decade from the late 1970's until the late 1980s. Pasifika theatre was first attached to Maori theatre. Actors often played Maori roles, because there were no Pasifika characters in plays at that time (IFO;MAI;GIL). Pasifika works in the 1970s were undocumented: plays were not published and there were no reviews. Around the early 1980s plays were similar to Western theatre in their form. These plays were often adaptations and such mimicry is typical of postcolonial theatre (C. B Balme, 1999). Similarly to Maori theatre the

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<sup>11</sup> Except for Statement Theatre, which was established in the 1970s, and toured in schools and focused on theatre and education.

plays had a strong political-social message. In the following section the first Pasifika play, first theatre company and first solo show are discussed as the examples for Pasifika theatre.

#### **4.2.1 Taotahi ma Uo: *Le Matau* (1984)**

Taotahi ma Uo, the first Maori- Pasifika theatre company, was established in 1981 by Helen Jarroe and Stephen Sinclair. The group is most remembered for producing the first full-length Pasifika play, *Le Matau* (1984) written by Samson Samasoni and Stephen Sinclair. The play is about Samoan migrants' experiences in New Zealand; migration later became a dominant theme in early Pasifika theatre. The protagonist is Ioane, a Samoan migrant living in Wellington. Whilst working to send money back to his family, he is acutely aware of the differences between Samoa and urbanised Wellington. The play explores loss and consequent nostalgia for life in the Pacific and highlights how difficult it is for Ioane to adapt to an urbanised lifestyle and New Zealand culture. According to Keown, *Le Matau* encapsulates the experiences of Samoan migrants 'who suffer from cultural alienation after coming to New Zealand in search of employment opportunities' (Keown, 2007, p. 212). These themes, cultural alienation and search of employment, later emerged as the key motives in Pasifika plays about migration. By pinpointing how important success was for early migrants, *Le Matau* established the search for success as a prominent theme in Pasifika theatre.

#### **4.2.2 Pacific Theatre**

Pacific Theatre, not to be confused with the umbrella term 'Pasifika theatre', is the first all-Pasifika theatre company established by Justine Simeï Barton in 1987, in Auckland. Auckland at that time was demographically multicultural, but culturally monocultural, and Simeï Barton describes the city as a void: 'there was nothing [t]here, [...] it was mono-cultural. There was not anything [I] could relate to' (Herrick, 2007). Simeï Barton found that there were only a few plays relevant to her. One day in the university library she accidentally discovered the script of *Feiva/Favour*, a Papua New Guinea musical, and she immediately decided to stage the play. Pacific Theatre staged the production with fifteen actors at the Maidment's Little Theatre. The performance was hugely successful, as Simeï Barton recalled that 'it was a smash hit [...] and [I] suddenly realised there was a market here, and that the Polynesian voice need to be heard' (Herrick, 2007). This discovery led her to establish the Pacific Theatre in 1987.

Pacific Theatre produced Shakespeare's *Othello*, which received mixed reviews (Herrick, 2007). Shakespeare's plays were frequently adapted in early Pasifika theatre, and *Othello* was followed by *Romeo and Juliet* (1992), *Romeo and Tusi* (by Pacific Underground), and *Bare* (by Toa Fraser). Karl Kite-Rangi, director and playwright, emphasised that Pasifika theatre makers respect Shakespeare's originals, but still adapt his plays according to their own purposes (O'Donnell & Tweddle, 2003b).

Practitioners modified Shakespeare's stories to fit their own environment, facilitating discussions about racism, ethnicity, and gender. Practitioners do not agree on Shakespeare's role in Pasifika theatre; some see him a symbol of the continuing dominance of colonial discourses (ANO1) while others enjoy reworking his texts and stories (LEE, KIG). Practitioners often used the originals as opportunities to expose the differences between European and Pasifika cultures. Kightley explained the importance of Shakespeare for Pasifika theatre through the example of *Romeo and Tusi*, which draws attention to the distance between Shakespeare's world and Pasifika audience's experiences (KIG).

Pacific Theatre produced a series of successful plays in the early 1990s. Pacific theatre's play, *Lupe and Sina: A Love Story With Cannibals*, was selected for development at the 1990 Playwrights Conference, which wanted to help emerging theatre practitioners. The director was Justine Simei Barton and the dramaturg was Murray Edmond (Warrington, 1994). While there is no more information available in the production, the support from the Playwrights Conference signals the growing amount of support available for Pasifika theatre practitioners from the early 1990s. An all-Pasifika cast under the direction of Simei Barton and Alan Brunton performed Pacific Theatre's next play, *Romeo and Juliet*, at Auckland University's Summer Shakespeare in 1992. The university found the play controversial and tried to stop the production. Simei Barton recalled an openly racist university's memo, which was quoted to members of Pacific theatre 'the university was "not ready to see people running around in tapa cloths trying to speak English" '. The university was not only reluctant to support the work but the idea of staging a play with a full Pasifika cast was found 'quite offensive' (Herrick, 2007).

The episode illustrated how racist an environment Pasifika practitioners operated in, and without planting its actors in the voting committee for the festival line up, Pacific Theatre would never have gained permission for the performance, remembered Simei Barton (Herrick, 2007). At that time, there were not a lot of development opportunities for Pasifika actors, and Pacific Theatre was important, because it was one of few places where Pasifika actors could act. One of these actors, Etetuai Ete, used his experiences to write and perform *The Johnny Smith Myth*, the first solo show written and performed by a Pasifika theatre maker in New Zealand. While Pacific Theatre does not exist anymore, Justine Simei Barton is still working in theatre. As recently as 2007, Justine Simei Barton directed *Lena* by Jason Greenwood in 2007.

#### **4.2.3 Statement Theatre**

In the 1970s Nathaniel Lees, one of the most successful Pasifika theatre makers and known for his role as Captain Mifune in the Matrix trilogy, established Statement Theatre, a company that

specialised in performing in schools. Statement Theatre wanted to perform Pasifika stories so Pasifika students could identify with the narratives and characters. Although professional theatre companies did visit schools, Lees claimed his troupe was more significant than parallel European company's performances, because the European plays 'had no relevance to people's lives in South Auckland'<sup>12</sup>(LEE). Members of the company visited schools, and asked students about their problems; the material thus gained was reshaped into new performances. In this way, Statement Theatre successfully reached Pasifika students not targeted by other professional theatre companies. It was the first Pasifika theatre company that primarily focused on education.

#### **4.2.4 Whakarite Theatre Company**

Whakarite Theatre Company (Christchurch) was a government funded education initiative that provided theatre training for Maori and Pasifika youth from the end of the 1980s through the first half of the 1990s. Whakarite Theatre Company was linked to the Puawai-Polynesian performing arts school (Puawai) which trained 'Maori and Pasifika at risk youth' (GIL). Erolia Ifopo, who trained with the Puawai, described the course as a combination of dance, drama, and music production. She explained that most students, her included, had no formal training in performance, and the course was a gateway for students such as her to meet and collaborate<sup>13</sup> with theatre practitioners. At that time there were only a few theatre practitioners in Christchurch, which meant it was a small community where practitioners all knew each other. However, as Robert Gilbert, a European director, school teacher involved with Puawai, pointed out, when the course finished 'it was clear that [...] there was nowhere to go' for Pasifika and Maori students, because there were no job opportunities in theatre (GIL). Whakarite Theatre Company was established specifically to fill this void, and to enable students from Puiwai to continue their career in performing arts. The company's first play was *The Waitara Purchase*(1989), a story about Maori land purchasing in the North Island. As part of the Theatre and Education initiative, Whakarite Theatre Company specialised in performing Maori-related stories and legend in schools and often performed in Maraes. Soon Whakarite Theatre Company, led by Robert Gilbert, took over the old cinema in Worcester Street,<sup>14</sup> transforming it into a performing arts centre from where the group toured all over New Zealand. Whakarite Theatre Company mainly performed 'new New Zealand works' and Maori stories. Performing new New Zealand work at schools was unique at that time, as Ifopo remembered: 'there was no other group out there doing it' (IFO). Kightley also joined Whakarite Theatre Company in

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<sup>12</sup> The percentage of Pasifika people and Maori is especially high in South Auckland (Social and Economic Research and Monitoring team, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Students collaborated with other groups and performers, including opera singers, and they often auditioned for television roles.

<sup>14</sup> The move and new building was funded by the Christchurch City Council.

order to find permanent work. Practitioners considered Whakarite Theatre Company a Maori theatre company because there were no Pasifika characters, and because Pasifika actors played mainly Maori roles, as there were not enough Maori actors. Pasifika characters were rare in New Zealand, because there were hardly any Pasifika writers and Pasifika plays. The only ways Pasifika actors could gain experience was by playing Maori roles, playing generic 'brown characters' (IFO; LEE) such as slaves, or by appearing as Pacific stereotypes, mainly fierce warriors and barely clothed dancers. Pasifika theatre was on the margins of New Zealand's theatre scene and there was no collaboration with professional companies. Pasifika theatre practitioners did not have their own voice and characters. They however were motivated to separate from Maori theatre and develop their own voice. Pasifika actors wanted to play Pasifika roles, which is why they established Pacific Underground, one of the first and one of the longest running Pasifika theatre companies in New Zealand. The formation of Pacific Underground marked a new stage in Pasifika theatre.

#### **4.3 Paving the way: a growth spurt of Pasifika theatre**

In the 1990s the Pasifika population grew by 39%, but acting in New Zealand still felt like a void to some practitioners, including Kightley (2002). Kightley remembered:

It was funny, New Zealand was a very different in the 1990s. [...] We were very much a minority, and we didn't have our voice out there. [...] So, I remember that time, the newness of it, writing, people, plays, performing, people being surprised, meeting Samoan actors, touring our work. (KIG)

Practitioners started out in a void in the 1990s, but by the end of the decade, theatre companies had a larger audience, more publicity, and grew in number. These companies were pioneers and Kightley described them as 'fearless': they introduced a new audience to theatre, built a core audience, and began to tour successfully nationally and internationally (KIG). They continued setting the scene for later companies and sketched the image of Pasifika theatre, including its genres, formulas, and audience. The following section discusses three companies, The Brownies, Pacific Underground, and The Naked Samoans.

##### **4.3.1 The Brownies**

The Brownies (Auckland) were one of the first Pasifika comedy duos in New Zealand. The two members were Canada Alofa McCarthy and Vela Brian Manusaute, who later established Kila Kokonut Krew. In 1997, they won Best Comedians Award in New Zealand, and went on to tour in Australia and Samoa. Their work was syncretic, combined fale'aitu and contemporary comedy, and as McCarthy explained it was family friendly theatre.



We purposely have kept the humour clean so that no-one will be offended. 'The Brownies' is now a regular draw card at the TV2 Annual Laugh Festival in Auckland. The only topics we do not touch are things like rape, suicide, and serious issues like that. (Leilua, 2003)

The troupe was less political than later troupes were, because it did not deal with serious social issues. Manusaute identified The Brownies as the first comedy duo in New Zealand and emphasised that it had an important role in shaping New Zealand comedy (MAN). The troupe introduced the audience to comedy, and future companies capitalised on their success. Manusaute remembered that 'we first came out with it, and then after that the Naked Samoans came through' (MAN). The success of comedy with Pasifika references and positive audience feedback highlighted a gap in the market. The Brownies were a new type of Pasifika performance that responded to a growing demand for entertainment geared specifically to Pasifika people.

#### **4.3.2 Kneubuhl: Think of a Garden**

John Kneubuhl, American Samoan playwright, worked in the United States but one of his last plays, *Think of a Garden*, premiered in Samoa and it was performed in New Zealand<sup>15</sup> (J. Kneubuhl, 1997). It was one of the first Pacific plays performed in a professional theatre in New Zealand<sup>16</sup>. The play is similar to later Pasifika plays in that it examines family, memory, history, spirituality, and search for identity. The story starts in American Samoa in 1929, during the Mau movement's fight for political independence and criticises New Zealand for failing to keep the events in order<sup>17</sup>. The story ends with the shooting of Samoa's leader, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III in Apia. The rules and traditions surrounding family, mourning, death and time as historical and spiritual concepts are Samoan elements, through which the play negotiates the place of Samoan traditions and history in a changing world. Themes are different from the migration stories dominating Pasifika theatre during this era, and Samoan traditions and spirituality have more importance in the play. *Think of a Garden* is important in the history of Pasifika theatre, as it was one of the first Pasifika plays performed in a professional theatre venue, because it showed the possibilities in theatre in terms of creativity, success, community building for Pasifika communities and artists (Carter, 2002). It is also one of the few plays that dealt with pre-migration political and historical themes<sup>18</sup>.

#### **4.3.3 Pacific Underground**

Pacific Underground, the only significant Pasifika theatre company in Christchurch, was established when members of the Whakarite Theatre Company, in particular Michelle Muagututi'a, Erolia Ifopo,

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<sup>15</sup> *Think of a Garden* was directed by Nathaniel Lees.

<sup>16</sup> *Think of a Garden* premiered Auckland and Taki Rua Theatre and then performed in Wellington in 1995.

<sup>17</sup> The Mau movement was a peaceful independence movement in Samoa, starting in the beginning of the 1900s, culminating to Black Saturday (1929), a clash between demonstrators and the New Zealand police and leading to the country's independence in 1962 (Boyd, 1996; Wendt, 1965)

<sup>18</sup> For others see: *Lena*

and Oscar Kightley, were touring *Horizons* in 1992. Whakarite Theatre Company's repertoire consisted of new New Zealand plays, many of them focused on Maori issues. Therefore, the Pasifika members of the company often played Maori roles. It was from their aspiration to perform Pasifika stories and play Pasifika roles that Pacific Underground was founded. Tanya Muagututi'a, who was helping her friend with *Horizons* at that time, explained that 'Pacific Underground came about as we wanted to tell our own stories, have Pacific Island roles; stories that we had, with Pacific Island roles' (MUA\_T). Pos Mavaega, another member of the troupe, emphasised that it was an initiative by a group of friends, and a bottom-up process, 'it was a group of people always together. It was not called PU back then; a group of us was always hanging out together' (MAV). Kightley described the process as 'we thought: "wouldn't it be cool to do some Pacific Island stuff". So we thought we would be actors and act but there weren't many parts for PIs so we had to write ourselves' (KIG). Overall, the motives behind establishing one of New Zealand's longest running Pasifika theatre companies were creating Pasifika narratives and creating roles for Pasifika actors.

### **Fresh off the Boat**

Pacific Underground's first show was *Fresh off the Boat* (1993) written by Oscar Kightley and Simon Small. Fresh off the boat (FOB) is a term used for migrants to emphasise their new migrant status and difference from the rest of the population. Neither Kightley nor Small had experience in writing plays beforehand, but the director, Nathaniel Lees, was one of the most prominent practitioners, who had worked in theatre for almost two decades by then. The play was workshopped in Dunedin. It was the first time the Pacific Underground cast worked together, some actors were from Whakarite Theatre Company, others, like Tanya Muagututi'a and Pos Mavaega, belonged to their group of friends. It was performed nationally,<sup>19</sup> and toured to Samoa.

*Fresh off the Boat* (2005) portrays a story of migration, the experience of being new in New Zealand and searching for a new identity. Charlie arrives to New Zealand from Samoa, and expects that, while life in New Zealand would be better, he could still follow the Samoan way. Staying with his sister and her two daughters, he faces cultural value difference, inter-ethnic relationships, and weakening of patriarchal hierarchies. The play also reveals inter-generational conflict between mother and daughter, and draws attention to the disappointment of Pasifika people who come to New Zealand: 'we were told that this place was a land of milk and honey, well I think the milk has gone off', says Samoa, the daughters' friend (Kightley&Small,2005p.3). The portrayal of reality diverging from migrant's expectations is a reoccurring theme in Pasifika theatre makers' work (IFO;

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<sup>19</sup> In 1993-1994 *Fresh off the Boat* toured to Wellington and Auckland, and in 1995 it was performed in Wellington again.

MAN). The problem of the lost generations,<sup>20</sup> and the importance of material and professional success are visible in *Fresh off the Boat*. The pursuit of success is a prevalent theme in *Le Matau*, a number of Pacific Underground productions, and in *The Naked Samoans Go Home*.

The sisters Tanya and Mishelle Muagututi'a also played sisters in the play. They explained that the play was purposefully written for that cast; Tanya Muagututi'a remembered that 'it is like they wrote the play for the crew they were with; they had the story in mind and then included the cast' (MUA\_T). Ifopo pointed out that she especially liked some of the characters, as they were not only vivid and interesting, but also reflected the complexities of constructing Pasifika women's identities:

It reflected what Island women, young people are like. Some of them try to go, 'ask why are we doing this, why have we done that, and I want to find my roots' and the other is going 'but if we would be like that we couldn't not have do not that'. It presented both sides. (IFO)

An underlying theme is negotiation of ethnicity and identity in the multicultural context of New Zealand. The differences are highlighted by unconventional characters like the Samoan mother who brings her children up in a European way and has a European partner, but still emphasises the obligations to family, and 'Island style' (IFO). The production itself had a very different atmosphere from European theatre, as Ifopo remembered, 'it was not like just a white cast. It was interesting. There were a lot of half casts around' (IFO).

*Fresh off the Boat* started Pacific Undergrounds' presence in New Zealand theatre and was one of the first plays that tells a migration story. Negotiation of ethnic tensions and identities, conflicts and cultural differences arising from the migration experience are themes that came to dominate Pasifika theatre in the years to come.

### **Theatre and education**

During the early years, Pacific Underground followed the footsteps of Whakarite Theatre Company, and was involved in Theatre and Education Trust tours. Most of their early plays are educational, and the topics are for children of different ages. The most frequent topics tackled are bullying, ethnic tensions, and career choices. Inspired by events in the community and in New Zealand, the plays aim to educate and entertain. Keeping children engaged was a challenge. The troupe had to modify the show according to children's ages.

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<sup>20</sup> Lost generations is a terms used by and borrowed from Nathaniel Lees (LEE). The lost generation are the children of those first generation Pasifika migrants, who mainly arrived between the 1950s and 1970s. The children were encouraged to fit in to New Zealand society and be successful, thus did not learn their parents' first language.

Let's make it into a fun play and keep them engaged for 45 minutes. [It's] hard to keep kid focused, because if they get fidgety and they like it or not. If not, someone is going to yell out. Primary to high school, there was one play for all of them. There was a play for primary, and we changed it for high school. Change in their lingo, you know how they change their lingo; make it relate to them so they can understand the story. (ANO1)

With minor changes, the plays suited different age groups. The schools visited included high and low decile schools;<sup>21</sup> therefore Pacific Underground used topics that were relevant to children irrespective of age, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. Unlike Statement Theatre, they did not collect material directly from students. The feedback highlighted the demand for these plays. However, there is little known about these very first plays. Their first educational play, *Gifted and Fresh* (1993), was written by Simon Small and Oscar Kightley, and the cast included Erolia Ifopo, Oscar Kightley, Mishelle Muagututi'a, and Michael Hodgson. *Gifted and Fresh* was followed by 'Who's The Flavour?' (1994), which was also written by Kightley, and the cast included Erolia Ifopo, Oscar Kightley, Mishelle Muagututi'a, and Michael Hodgson. Their next play was 'Absolutely Fobulous' (1995) by Victor Rodger; and main roles were played by Oscar Kightley, Mishelle Muagututi'a, Michael Hodgson, Sara-Lia Tamati, and Joy Vaele. Another play, *Room 7* (1997-1998) focuses on girl bullies, trying to break the gender stereotype and raise awareness. It is a story of a girl who bullies a boy in school, because she does not get enough attention at home, as there is a new baby in the family. 'It was a comedy and she did all sorts of stupid stuff, trying to get her friend to do it with her. And we just send message that it is not acceptable that behaviour, whether you are a boy or a girl' (MUA\_T). This play was followed by two other plays about girl bullies, such as the Cat Girls<sup>22</sup>. The plays on bullying were followed by *Rangi and Mao's excellent adventure*, which is based on the movies *Will and Ted's Excellent adventure* and *Will and Ted's Bogus journey*. The play follows the adventures of a Samoan and a Maori child, playfully approaching identity construction and ethnic differences. Pacific Underground still creates plays with similar storylines for children, for instance *Matariki*(2010). One of their last plays for children was *Nathan's nightmare* (1999-2000), a short comedy commissioned by the Book Writers Festival. The story follows Nathan battling with the elements, war, and natural disasters. These plays are entertaining and discussed topics like bullying, cultural and gender identities. They use Samoan cultural references, pop culture within the framework of Western theatre, and encourage audience-performer interaction.

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<sup>21</sup> Deciles are the way the Ministry of Education allocates funding to schools in New Zealand. Decile one schools have the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic background, and decile ten schools have the highest proportion of students from high socio-economic backgrounds. The lower a school's decile rating, the more funding it gets. (Ministry of Education, 2012)

<sup>22</sup> The Cat Girls were a group of girls on the play, who bullied other students.

## Later plays

*A Frigate Bird Sings*, written by Oscar Kightley and Dave Fane, was produced by Makerita Urale for the New Zealand International Festival of the Arts in 1995 (Kightley & Fane, 1995; Kightley, Fane, & Lees, 1996). Nathaniel Lees, who was involved in the development of the play from the beginning, remembered that after reading the first version of the script he had locked Small and Kightley into a hotel room for a night, and had granted them no exit until they finished. The initial idea, Lees explained, was to explore how fa'fafines'<sup>23</sup> position was changing in New Zealand. Fa'fafines became less accepted and more misunderstood, and fa'fafine identity was going through a rapid change (O'Donnell, 2007a). Pacific Underground's plays often have comic fa'fafine characters, based on their traditional performer role in the family and extravert personalities, *A Frigate Bird Sings* moves away from comic portrayal of fa'fafines, and explores the identity of Vili, an immigrant Samoan fa'fafine in New Zealand. The migrant experience in New Zealand, fractured by the difference between traditions and modern capitalist society, resulted in a divide between responsibility to the community and the individual's aspirations, which is a recurring theme, not only in Pasifika theatre, but also in transnational communities around the world (Besnier, 1996).

*Tatau: Rites of Passage* (1996) was Pacific Underground's first international collaboration; the company worked with Zeal Company from Australia. It was performed in Auckland as well as in Sydney on the Pacific Wave Festival. The production differed from other Pacific Underground performances that relied on Samoan humour, because *Tatau: Rites of Passage* bridged ritual and entertainment through presenting ancient Pacific tattooing traditions live on stage. *Tatau: rites of passage* is a performance piece infused with performance art. Similarly to plays like *Sons, No.2*, and *Paradise* it presents a quest for a personal history, one's cultural identity and roots, and values and connections. The tattoo becomes a ritual element that resolves the void between the character and his cultural identity. *Tatau* also shows alienation's effects, a result of acculturation into the New Zealand prison system. The production employed the collaborative working style Jenni Heka defined as intrinsic to Pasifika culture due to its emphasis on collaboration, and took it to an international level (HEK).

*Dawn Raids* (1997) is a controversial play written by Kightley, based on the era when the police targeted overstayers, who were stereotyped as Pasifika in the 1970s. The play shows the racist, discriminatory attitudes of the era and the violence against Pasifika people. *Dawn Raids* follows the indigenous theatre tradition in New Zealand, as Maori theatre often emphasise serious injustices

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<sup>23</sup> Fa'fafine is the third gender in Samoa, a a man who behaves like a woman (Besnier, 1996). 'Fa' means in the way of and 'fafine' means woman (Milner, 1966).

against Maori. 'Heavy issues', such as discussion of the dawn raids, are one of the similarities between early Pasifika theatre and Maori theatre, Anton Carter emphasised (CAR\_A).

*Romeo and Tusi*, written by Oscar Kightley and Erolia Ifopo, was Pacific Underground's third big production, performed between 1997 and 2000. The play was originally part of a 'theatre and education' tour, which visited several schools before it toured nationally (CAR\_A). *Romeo and Tusi* is based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and Brown describes the play as 'an irreverent approach to Shakespeare's original' (2009, p. 22). Based on the idea of a 'play in a play', *Romeo and Tusi* combines traditions of Samoan clowning with Shakespeare's story. Humour is used to highlight the racial tensions, in particular between Maori and Pacific communities.

*Romeo and Tusi* is centred around a high school production of *Romeo and Juliet*. The two main characters, 'Romeo' whose real name is Anaru is Maori, and Tusi is Samoan, are an interethnic couple (Kightley, Ifopo, & Muagututi'a, 2000). The play presents a story with arguing mothers, children in love, ethnic tensions and typically Samoan characters like Ruby, the fa'fafine. Even though the mothers live on the same street and their children go to the same school, the ethnic tension between Maori and Pasifika communities intensifies. Ruby, the fa'fafine, highlights postcolonial tensions through emphasizing the distance between Shakespeare's time and contemporary New Zealand. *Romeo and Tusi* uses Pacific humour, clowning, slapstick and stereotypes such as the Polynesian housie<sup>24</sup>-loving mother.

*Romeo and Tusi*, which was first performed in Mona Vale in Christchurch<sup>25</sup> was especially significant for its outdoors performances that involved audience members who would not have gone to a theatre otherwise. There was no booking required, and as the show was outside, the space was different from the "'traditional" high-culture theatre space' (Houlahan, 2009, p. 281). At the end of the show, the cast members passed buckets to the audience, seeking donations. The performance included a live band, and original music was an important to the success of the play. One of the songs, *Pure Love* written by Tanya Muagututi'a, was a national hit and was later published in Pacific Underground's first CD, *Landmarks*. Houlahan compared the event to a big picnic, and others described it as Shakespeare in 'kiwi style' that highlights the difficulties of the text and context for today's New Zealanders (2009) (ANO1). *Romeo and Tusi* introduced a new audience to Pasifika theatre, and the play 'was embraced by everyone, and they enjoyed it' (MUA\_M).

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<sup>24</sup> Housie is a form of gambling popular in New Zealand.

<sup>25</sup> *Romeo and Tusi's* performance at Mona Vale was part of the Summertimes Festival, funded by the Christchurch City Council.

*Island Summer* (2004) combined music and theatre. While Pacific Underground wrote it for a 24-guitar orchestra, it can be performed with only four musicians. The show can also be performed with or without the theatrical elements, which are often performed by musicians' children. The show included adaptations of old Samoan songs and the songs in *Island Summer* were later released as an album under the same name *Island Summer*. During the 2000s, Pacific Underground focused less on theatre and more on music, and in this respect *Island Summer* exemplifies this change.

### **Angels**

*Angels* (2009) is a play written by Joy Vaele and Tanya Muagututi'a, directed by Robert Gilbert. The production was Pacific Underground's first main bill performed with a professional theatre company, Court Theatre (Christchurch), which is one of New Zealand's longest running theatre companies<sup>26</sup>. The play was inspired because there were only a few plays by Pasifika women, explained Muagututi'a in an interview (MUA\_T). *Angels* is by Pasifika women, about Pasifika women and written in order to raise the profile of Pasifika women.

The story unfolds from the friendship of four women, who grow up in a Samoan community in New Zealand. *Angels* emphasises the importance of the local church, family, relationships, and aspirations. Music, spirituality, and religion are important themes, and the show included references to hymns, Sunday School, and White Sundays<sup>27</sup>. The story explores the different identities of four Samoan girls who grow up in Christchurch, and embark on a career in music (Fulop, 2010). The play is less reliant upon post-colonial stereotypes and Samoan clowning than previous Pacific Underground productions, and explores the freeing and restricting powers of community and religion. *Angels* is far removed from the immigration story and 'stories of memory' prominent in the first productions of Pacific Underground, and its primary focus is Pasifika people's lives in New Zealand.

#### **4.3.4 Naked Samoans**

Naked Samoans, a Pasifika comedy troupe founded in 1998 (Auckland), was similar to the Brownies in its form, a syncretism of theatre, and use of comedy and traditional fale'aitu. The founding members included former Pacific Underground members Oscar Kightley and David Fane, as well as Mario Gaoa, Shimpal Lelisi, Oscar Kightley, Robbie Magasiva, and Jerome Leota. Their first show's title *The Naked Samoans talk about their knives* (1998) is a parody of the New Zealand movie,

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<sup>26</sup> *Angels* was performed in Aranui High School as well as in the Court's studio theatre, the Forge.

<sup>27</sup> White Sundays are the Samoan equivalent of Children's Day, held on the second Sundays of October. Churches host special programmes, where children perform. Children also receive presents and other privileges (being served first for example).

*Topless women talk about their lives* (Sinclair, 1997). The emerging Pasifika comedy troupes in the late 1990s tapped into the same audience. The move away from theatrical realism to comedy and incorporation of Samoan culture and heritage may be a post-colonial development of Pasifika theatre. A similarly important influence is pop culture, especially American/global pop culture. The shows are characterised by post-modern, absurd, and dark humour, lack of political correctness, and emphasis on racism and discrimination, yet they do not shy away from occasional 'potty humour'. Through this unique combination of humour Pasifika comedy gained a commercial and political edge.

Naked Samoans characters, boys from a neighbourhood with distinct personalities, are more prominent in the television series (*Bro'Town*) inspired by the performances. The 'Samoan humour' is present in culturally specific jokes, for example when Shimpal Lelisi's character announces 'I've just come from the opening of the new traffic lights in town'<sup>28</sup> (Kata, 2006). The show is a break from Oscar Kightley's and David Fane's previous work with Pacific Underground because it borrows from *fale'aitu*, contemporary comedy and pop-culture, whilst moving away from theatrical realism. At this time, they had been making theatre for a decade and many of their plays, for instance *Dawn Raids*, raised political and social issues. Kightley explained that the company wanted to try a new style of performance: 'so me and my mates, who also worked in PU, we would do a play and enter it in a comedy festival. Because it was a change from the quasi-serious plays we were doing' (KIG). The issues explored are intrinsic to Pasifika people's lives, 'the strange thing was that we dealt with the same issues, just told it in a different way' (KIG).

The combination of pop-culture influences, Western and traditional performance styles, and cultural references specific to Pasifika people in New Zealand created a unique style of comedy, and the audience 'loved it' (KIG). The Naked Samoans and other comedy troupes quickly became successful with their new style of comedy, based on Western comedy, popular culture, and traditional *fale'aitu*.

### **Other media**

The Naked Samoans' success inspired several television and movie productions. *Bro'Town* is based on Naked Samoans skits, characters, and the same style of humour, and established itself as a successful primetime comedy show. The episodes follow one Maori and four Pasifika boys' adventures in a suburb somewhere in New Zealand. The show deals with ethnic conflict and identity, and everyday issues including school, bullying, and absence of parent-children relationships. While the show plays on stereotypes, it also highlights the divide between reality and the conservative,

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<sup>28</sup> From *The Naked Samoans go home* (again).



assimilationist, and bicultural political correctness present in ethnic discourse (Bannister, 2008). The show received criticism from the Pasifika academic community, specifically Melanie Anae, who emphasises that the show promoted stereotypes which '[Pasifika people] fought against in the '70s. [...] We've moved beyond the stereotype of just being entertainers' (Rees, 2006). Earl describes the series as commodification of Polynesian youth culture, combined with a clever marketing strategy, and identifies the phenomenon as a sign of an ideological shift toward multiculturalism in New Zealand (2006). At the same time, Earl points out, the show conformed to the white middle class masculinity and capitalist ideology (Earl, 2006). Theatre maker Justine Simeai Barton, in contrast, stressed that the show brought Pasifika work into the mainstream, which was a significant development in Pasifika theatre's and television's history. She also emphasised that it is humorous, 'what Oscar's managed to do is put Pasifika work on mainstream and that's something we all strive towards. Whether or not you like his work, you have to give him credit for that' (Wichte, 2006). Simeai Barton also pointed out that, although the show uses stereotypes, it has a strong social message and political foundation, and *Bro'Town* is radical in the way it presented racial discourse and ethnic tension: 'these guys are quite radical. But they're working from a strong foundation, a political foundation they understand and have been trained in' (Wichte, 2006).

*Bro'Town* was followed by *Sione's wedding*, a movie which features characters similar to *Bro'Town* and the Naked Samoans but presents them as adults, or rather as men who never grew up (C. Graham & Fraser, 2006). The events unfold around a Samoan wedding, which highlights the characters' struggle with growing up and the resulting change in their status in their community. There is also a perceived conflict between their urban lives in New Zealand and Samoan traditions. The movie is a less political comedy than *Bro' Town*.

After these successes, members of the Naked Samoans became popular in both theatre and television. Many of the company's members are most active in other projects (*Radiradira* for example), but Kightley emphasised that the company still exists. Their latest theatre productions saw a reunited troupe perform the *Naked Samoans go home* and the *Naked Samoans go home (again)*.

The Naked Samoans contributed to the appearance of Pasifika arts in the mainstream media. They brought socio-political issues to theatre and television in a way that was accessible and entertaining for a wide range of audience members. At the same time, they negotiated postcolonial representations of Pasifika people and engaged with the shift between the political and social discourses of biculturalism and multiculturalism, which is visible through politically incorrect humour on ethnicity-based stereotypes.

#### **4.3.5 Reflections on this phase: Pan-Pasifika ideas and developing two genres**

These early years of Pasifika theatre were characterised by a Pan-Pasifika worldview, exemplified by Pacific Underground, and Samoan dominance in Pasifika theatre, which continued in the next phase of Pasifika theatre. Simultaneously the two styles which came to dominate Pasifika theatre, realism based Pasifika theatre and Pasifika comedy, evolved. Western realism based Pasifika theatre discussed the effects of migration and the discrepancy between the 'Promised Land' and reality, and focused on experiences in the meeting space of different cultures in New Zealand. Soon after, Pasifika comedy emerged, which, as discussed in sections about *The Brownies* and *The Naked Samoans*, merged Western comedy with *fale'aitu*. While Pasifika comedy received controversial feedback, these troupes inspired other comedy troupes and became increasingly popular in coming years. At the same time, a number of theatre practitioners, such as Kightley and Manusaute, found their voices. This phase of Pasifika theatre was also about exploring whether there is a potential audience for Pasifika theatre. Kightley remembered that when 'we started doing plays [...] we didn't know if we could attract [an audience] but we did it, it was quite easy' (KIG). The first companies' success highlighted a demand for Pasifika theatre. They also began to build their core audience, which were the solid base from which Pasifika theatre practitioners branched out.

#### **4.4 Branching out: taking Pasifika theatre to a wider audience**

In the 1990s Pasifika theatre and its audience went through a growth spurt but it was not until the 2000s when Pasifika theatre reached popularity among Pasifika people. From the strong foundations laid down in the previous decades, there was a supply of trained practitioners, which the audience demanded. In the 2000s many of the previous practitioners operating in the previous decade, such as Kightley and Manusaute, still had output and innovation came from emerging practitioners including Toa Fraser and Victor Rodger. Themes shifted from migration stories to the aftermath in migration, and the search for one's Pasifika heritage. Using the two styles developed in the previous phase, practitioners branched out: the number and diversity of plays grew; there was a growing number of collaborations with professional companies, and training for younger practitioners started.

##### **4.4.1 Niu Sila**

*Niu Sila* (2004) was written by Oscar Kightley and Dave Armstrong. In the original production only two actors played approximately thirty different roles, comprising several ethnicities and genders.

The play is about two six-year old boys' friendship from the 1970's. Peter is European and Ioane is from a Pasifika background. The boys, who live in the same multicultural neighbourhood, overcome their cultural differences and become friends. In the beginning of the play schoolchildren explain

their theories about why Ioane has a ponytail with stereotypes of Pasifika people such as Pasifika people were feminine, 'because Islanders wear dresses around the house' or that Pasifika people could not afford scissors 'because they spend all their money on TAB and booze' (Kightley & Armstrong, 2005). As Ioane and Peter grow up, the characters on stage do not resemble the trusting boys earlier in the play. Peter becomes a specialist on bicultural issues, but he is also more prejudiced against Pasifika people. Ioane returns to Atua, and upon his return he is disillusioned with life in New Zealand and is reluctant to talk to Peter. *Niu Sila* figures prominently in Pasifika theatre's history because it includes both European perspectives on migration and on Pasifika culture.

Dave Armstrong, a co-writer, points out that the play also reflected change in New Zealand society, because while in the 1970s, people were racist, schools were not divided by ethnicity. Today people are more separated and have less interaction, as people from different cultures do not share the same social spaces, emphasises Armstrong (Tu'u, 2006).

#### **4.4.2 Kila Kokonut Krew**

Vela Manusaute began working in comedy in the early 1990s and when ten years later he could not find enough acting opportunities he decided to produce his first show, *Taro King* (2002). *Taro King* was produced in collaboration with Auckland Theatre Company in an attempt to nurture New Zealand talent (CAM). The play was written and directed by Manusaute and had a cast of over twenty actors. *Taro King* is a migration story that explores life in New Zealand and highlights gaps between reality and expectations. The play is semi-autobiographical. Manusaute similarly to the character was disillusioned with life in New Zealand and worked in a supermarket. He remembered: 'when my son was born, I was working in the supermarket, and [I] was thinking this is not what [I] should be doing, I am a creative person,' (MAN). The main character in the play is Filipo, who was born in Samoa but raised in New Zealand. He supports his family by cutting taro<sup>29</sup> in a supermarket in Otara, Auckland. He is disappointed because he imagined life would be better in New Zealand, he thought of New Zealand as the 'land of milk and honey' (MAN). Fijian-Indians, who imported taro from Fiji, run the supermarket. Unexpectedly, the New Zealand government stops all imports from Fiji, as a reaction to an attempted coup. As jobs in the supermarket are in danger, differences between ethnicities become more visible. Unlike earlier plays like *Fresh off the Boat*, the story is not about the immediate effect of migration; instead, it questions whether New Zealand is a really the land of milk and honey for Pasifika people.

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<sup>29</sup> Taro is a root vegetable often used in Pacific cuisine

*Taro King* was so successful that Manusaute, and cast members Anapela Polataivao, Stacey Leilua and Aleni Tufuga decided to establish their own company in 2003. They named it Kila Kokonut Krew, because its abbreviation, KKK, shocked people, thus generated publicity<sup>30</sup>. Leilua recalled the experience vividly:

We were all sitting around in the studio and thinking what we should be called. [...] we want to challenge people. [...] It was so funny, because when we first started, people were like 'no you can't do that, are you serious?!'(LEI)

The name, then, was chosen for its shock value. KKK's meaning is inseparable from racism but the company tried to reverse the racist connotation by associating the abbreviation with a 'group of brown people' (LEI).

*Playaz Night* (2005), a successful comedy, and *Super Fresh*, a political comedy that highlights the differences between cultures, were both performed at the International Comedy Festival, Auckland (2008). *Playaz Night* was followed by *Once were Samoans* (2006).<sup>31</sup> The title is based on the New Zealand movie, *Once were warriors*. The show, similar to previous Kila Kokonut Krew productions, uses humour to tell a story of a bicultural (Samoan and Maori) family. Part of the play was performed during Artspeak, and one of the Samoan characters<sup>32</sup> argued that one was like a Maori even if one is not brought up by Maori, and suggested that core characteristics are unchanging and innate. Such opinions suggest that identity is based on ethnicity. *Once were Samoans* also discusses conflict based on ethnic stereotypes and prejudice. A Maori man, who is trying to have a relationship with his neighbour, a Samoan girl, faces strong opposition from the girl's parents, who believe all Maori are untrustworthy.

Kila Kokonut Krew's next show with Auckland Theatre Company (2010) was an adaptation Dario Fo's *We can't pay we will not pay*. Manusaute directed the show, and Anapela Polataivao and Goretti Chadwick played the main characters. The original play is about two women, who while shopping in a supermarket, get embroiled in a price-riot (Fo, Colvill, & Walker, 1982). The women are reluctant to tell the whole story to their husbands and consequent lies and misunderstandings are portrayed with slapstick humour. The humour and the story are the same in Kila Kokonut Krew's adaptation,

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<sup>30</sup> Kila Kokonut Krew has the same initials as Klu Klux Klan, the far right organization in the United States of America.

<sup>31</sup> *Once were Samoans* was toured between 2007- 2009; and was performed at the International Comedy Festival, Auckland (2006, 2007), BATS Theatre, Wellington (2007), Mau Forum, Henderson (2006), Rotorua Arts Festival (2009), Festival of Culture, Palmerston North (2009), the Maori King's Coronation, Ngaruawahia (2008), Fuel Festival, Hamilton (2008), Pasifika Spectacular Festival (2009) and in Brisbane (2009).; and it had its own season.

<sup>32</sup> My observation notes state that it was the character of the mother. However, no script is available for the play.

but the events take place in South Auckland's Pasifika community, and not in Italy. In fact, all Kila Kokonut Krew productions and initiatives reflected the company's ties to South Auckland communities. *The Factory* is New Zealand's first Pasifika musical (2011). The music is inspired by traditional Samoan songs and the story is an original piece by Kila Kokonut Krew. The play is a 'tribute' to first-generation Pasifika immigrants that worked in factories and a criticism of Pasifika people's situation who still work in factories and struggle financially (Fresh, 12 February 2011; Tagata Pacifica, 18 August 2011).

### **Training and development**

Kila Kokonut Krew created opportunities, *Strictly Brown and The Young Kila Writers*, for South Auckland playwrights to train new playwrights and to expand Kila Kokonut Krew's repertoire. The Young Kila Writers is expected to strengthen second and third generation Pasifika theatre makers' voices in theatre and expand Kila Kokonut Krew's audience explained Manusaute (MAN). The first readings, workshops and performances of short pieces took place in 2010 including *Four women* and *Kingdom of Lote*. Young Kila Writers project differed from the first phase of Banana Boat Writers because it focused on production rather than on script development. Kila Kokonut Krew's approach was also more selective as Banana Boat offered support to any aspiring Pasifika playwright. While continuities exist, the company is set apart by their focus on second-generation's stories and training.

The first full-length Tongan play performed in New Zealand was *Kingdom of Lote*,<sup>33</sup> written by Suli Moa and produced by Kila Kokonut Krew. *Kingdom of Lote* was a project by Kila Kokonut Krew's development project, Young Kila Writers. The play explores Tongan identity and culture through the story of a Tongan rugby player and his wife. They try to negotiate the expectations of the traditional Tongan ways and community with life in New Zealand. The comedy has both English and Tongan dialogues, and its performances were one of the first times Tongan was spoken on stage in New Zealand.

*Four Women*, written by Leilani Salesa, is another product of the Young Kila Writers. The play is about Pasifika women's life, and the main character is a young Afakasi woman, who advocates social change and speaks up against stereotypes, racism, and her culture's limitations, including women's traditional passive role in society. Her character stands in contrast to her cautious and conservative friend, who is more passive and traditional. *Four Women* is one of the first Pasifika plays that explore women's relation to tradition, community and life in New Zealand.

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<sup>33</sup>*Kingdom of Lote* was performed at South Auckland Pacific Arts Summit, Mangere Arts Centre.

*Strictly Brown* (2009)<sup>34</sup> included six comedy acts presented by emerging artists, including a skit by Pani and Pani, one of the first Pasifika female comedy duos, in collaboration with Auckland Theatre Company. The show was set up as a talent search to the company modelled on *Amateur Night at the Apollo*, an American television show (LEI). To attract more audience *Strictly Brown* featured musicians and guest appearances, including Robbie Magasiva from Naked Samoans.

#### **4.4.3 The Laughing Samoans**

The Laughing Samoans, a comedy duo established by Eteuati Ete and Tofiga Fepulea'i in 2003, are unique among Pasifika comedy troupes in that they use Samoan specific family humour. Their first show was *Laughing With Samoans* (2003)<sup>35</sup> followed by *A Small Samoan Wedding* (2004), *Old School* (2005), *Off Work* (2006), *Crack Me Off* (2008), and *Prettyfull Woman* (2009). *The Laughing Samoans* then toured nationally and internationally with *Greatest Hits* (2010), and they published DVDs. The Laughing Samoans used situational comedy similar to fale'aitu, comic characters, and wordplays, for comic effect. Fale'aitu's influence was most visible when the actors often played women's roles. While their skits are not overtly political, they employ Samoan stereotypes, cultural in-jokes and often politically incorrect humour for comic effect. The Laughing Samoans frequently juxtaposes Samoans in Samoa and Samoans in New Zealand, which makes them different from other comedy. They are also a more family friendly comedy troupe than The Naked Samoans for instance, because there is no cursing or offensive language in their shows.

#### **4.4.4 Albert Wendt: The Songmaker's Chair**

Albert Wendt's play *The Songmaker's Chair* was first performed in (2003) in collaboration with Auckland Theatre Company at the Maidment Theatre (Auckland) (Wendt, 2004). Nathaniel Lees directed the production. Albert Wendt is a novelist and a leading figure of Pacific literature, who pioneered the use of Samoan references and history in his work. The play is about three generations of the Peseola family. The grandparents migrated to New Zealand from Samoa, but the other two generations grew up in Auckland. In the play we see the family gather together in order to settle the matter of succession. The role of the head of the family is to continue the 'Peseola way' a combination of individualism and tradition, which keeps the family together and safeguards Samoan traditions. All four children are reluctant to take on the position, as they were yet to come to terms with their identity. The eldest son fears that his education made him more a New Zealander, the younger wants to write, one daughter married a Maori, and the other battles addictions. Ethnic

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<sup>34</sup> Performed at Manukau Festival of the Arts in Collaboration with Auckland Theatre Company, Manukau Festival of the Arts

<sup>35</sup> *Laughing With Samoans* featured a third actor, James Nokice, but he left after the show.

conflict, migration stories, and family tensions are prominent throughout the play. In the play the grandparents perform a well-rehearsed fale'aitu sketch with smooth karate moves and witty humour, and this scene is the only direct incorporation of fale'aitu in Pasifika theatre. Samoan culture and Samoan point of view are introduced through Samoan history, song, performing arts traditions, and language (O'Donnell, 2007 b). *The Songmaker's Chair* brakes with the typical migration stories when the grandparents confess that they did not only look for a better lifestyle but also for adventure when they migrated to New Zealand. *The Songmaker's Chair* is unique because it presents complex personalities, who battle with their identities and their place in their communities, in a non-comic fashion. O'Donnell points out that the play represents a Pan-Pasifika approach because it incorporates several cultural identities (2007 b). However, its language and cultural and historical references make *The Songmaker's Chair* uniquely Samoan-New Zealander rather than a Pan-Pasifika play.

#### 4.4.5 Toa Fraser

Toa Fraser is a Fijian-English playwright and film director whose plays include *Bare* (1998), *No. 2* (1999), and *Paradise* (2001). Thematically the focus is on life in New Zealand and on the aftermath of migration and structurally they show Brecht's influences. His plays also revealed competing discourses, such as post-colonialism in *Bare* or the lost Pacific in *Paradise*.

In Fraser's first play, *Bare*, fifteen characters were performed by two actors in the first performance (T. Fraser, 2007). As the two actors spoke through the audience and to the audience, the fourth wall<sup>36</sup> disappeared. The play explores human relationships and interactions in numerous interconnected monologues and occasional dialogues between stereotypical characters such as an academic woman, a gym fanatic, and a manager of a family restaurant. Fraser makes it difficult to identify with the characters with shifting characters and juxtaposition, but this alienation helps the audience to identify with socioeconomic differences. Stereotypical characters are juxtaposed: the academic woman who asked 'so I want you think about present-day representations and constructions of the South Pacific, and see how all that fits in with what you are reading at the moment' is contrasted with stereotypes from a lower economic status talking about racism 'nah, didn't go and see that bro.[...] Nah I don't support that shit aye bro' (T. Fraser, 2007). One monologue explores Shakespeare's notions of race and ethnicity and draws attention to

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<sup>36</sup> The fourth wall is the imaginary wall between the stage and the audience. It relies on a separation of audience and performers, and a suspension of disbelief. Such suspension of disbelief means that the audience treats the experience as observation of events through a one-way glass, where they can see the performers but the performers are not aware of their presence.

Shakespeare's language and English as the markers of colonisation. Stereotypes are represented with exaggerated accents, language and gestures (Fresno-Calleja, 2010).

*No.2*, Fraser's second play, is about a Fijian family's matriarch who calls the family together to settle the matter of succession (T. Fraser, 2007). The play uses humour to describe family and intergenerational conflict, and explores searching for identity, one's place in the community, and the tension between tradition and life in New Zealand. Both *No.2* and *The Songmaker's Chair*, which had its first readings around the time of *No.2*'s debut, explore family succession, but *No.2* uses more comedy and less historical references to traditional culture. The plays are significant because they are the first to discuss succession as a Pacific tradition in the New Zealand context. However in the *The Songmaker's Chair* the gathering is an opportunity to deal with issues from the past, *No.2* is more about recent issues and current dynamics in the family. *No.2* explores universal themes such as love, sibling rivalry, and the quest for identity. *No.2* was turned into a movie and became one of the two Pasifika box office hits.

Fraser's third play, *Paradise*, is about a rugby player, who feels distant and alienated from his Fijian heritage because he was raised in New Zealand; to find a connection he decides to find his father in Fiji. His grandmother represents the older generations who were more closely connected to their culture than their offspring. The play explores that it is possible to have a spiritual connection to one's heritage.

#### **4.4.6 Victor Rodger**

Victor Rodger's plays have been performed in professional theatres throughout New Zealand including Court Theatre, Downstage Theatre, and Auckland Theatre Company. *Sons* (2007)<sup>37</sup> is a semi-autobiographical play about Noah, a successful half-Samoan DJ. Noah is brought up by his European mother and his Scottish grandmother, and he has not seen his Samoan father since childhood. Noah, despite his grandmother's protestations, decides to find his father in order to learn more about Samoan culture. His father has undergone a transformation, from being a careless drinker and partygoer. He is now a respectable churchgoer with a new family. The play is among the first to feature characters from mixed ethnic background with complexity and richness. Noah wants to belong both cultures and he disagrees with his father who argues that 'there is no such thing, you are either one or the other' (Rodger, 2007 :29). Noah's search for his history and 'true identity' are characteristic of the Pacific diasporic experience (Avia foreword to *Sons* (Rodger, 2007). The play,

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<sup>37</sup> *Sons*, after being accepted to the 1994 Australasian Playwrights' Workshop and Court Two, Christchurch in 1995, was rewritten and performed at Downstage theatre as well.



despite its serious subject matter, is filled with Samoan jokes and situational humour, which may be amusing regardless of the audience's ethnicity.

Nan: You have no idea what you are letting yourself in for. Mark my words.

Noah: Sorry, have not got a highlighter on me.

(Rodger, 2007b)

After *Sons*, during Rodger's time in Toi Whakaari, he wrote *Cunning stunts*, of which little is known. The play was performed at BATS in Wellington as part of the Young and Hungry 1997.

*Ranterstantrum* (2002) his next play, is about stereotype construction. 'Why are they all like that, why are they all so angry' exclaims a European couple in the beginning of the play (p.11). Ironically, the couple soon become aggressors when they tie up a Pasifika dinner guest, thinking he was an intruder. They proceed to engage the man in dialogue, discussing their fears, anger, and racist attitudes. The conversation reveals prejudices against Pasifika people, who are uniformly seen as criminals. While the man they just tied up turns out to be a homosexual, middle class actor, the couple's racist prejudice remain unchanged. In the end, the Pasifika actor is not surprised because he knows people often see him as just another Pasifika person.

Rodger's most critically acclaimed play, *My Name is Gary Cooper*, was produced by Auckland Theatre Company in 2007. The play challenges the sexualised and careless stereotype of Samoans. The story starts in the 1950s in Samoa with the making of a Hollywood movie, continues in Hollywood in the 1970s, and end in New Zealand in the 2000s. The main character is Gary who takes revenge on his American father for leaving his mother by sleeping with his father's wife, daughter, and son. However, twenty years later history repeats itself when Gary realises he fathered a daughter with his father's wife, and thus he is not much different from his father. The play uses and negates stereotypes such as the foreigner who takes advantage of naïve Pacific women, the naïve Pacific Islander, and the overtly sexualised Pacific Islander.

Victor Rodger's plays are significant as they reject comedy genre to explore gender issues and multi-layered ethnicities. His plays are performed in professional theatres, whose audience was primarily European.

#### **4.4.7 Reflections on 'Branching out'**

In the 2000s Pasifika companies branched out and reached for popularity; 'Pacific flavour' started to become a trend (CHA). Rodger, Wendt and Kila Kokonut Krew took Pasifika plays into mainstream theatres so that European theatre goers gained familiarity with Pasifika theatre. Playwrights also

introduced new perspectives, *Niu Sila* was the first play that portrayed Pasifika migration from an European point of view, and Roger's plays explore gender issues. Thematically, the playwrights' focus shifted onto Pasifika people's lives in New Zealand, but plays by Fraser, Wendt, and Rodger portrayed a quest for lost Pasifika heritage and multi-layered Pasifika identities. The Naked Samoans contrast Samoans in New Zealand with Samoans in Samoa to show how Pasifika people moved on from being early migrants in a new country. Kila Kokonut Krew also started a training programme for second- and third-generation playwrights, whom are expected to be the new branches of Pasifika theatre.

#### **4.5 New branches, new leaves: contemporary Pasifika theatre**

Pasifika theatre seems to have developed relatively linearly until the mid-2000s, but around that time it diversified. It is not yet clear if the new branches and leaves point to major trends, hence any conclusions reached in this section are tentative. A definite area of growth is plays by second- and third-generation practitioners, supported by training initiatives and funding. While Pan-Pasifika and Samoan practitioners continue to dominate, there is a steady growth of practitioners, such as Iaheto Ah Hi and Nina Nawalowalo, who are from smaller Pasifika ethnicities. The two dominant forms of Pasifika theatre stand strong, but formal experimentations with visual theatre and puppetry are exciting changes.

##### **4.5.1 Music and me**

*Music and me* (2012) by Victoria Schmidt is about Pasifika people's lives and aspirations in today's society. A prostitute, a man suffering from dementia, a rapper and thief, and a beauty parlour owner struggle with everyday issues such as money, jobs, and relationships. Their goal is 'to live the dream. [...] Never go hungry again!' (Schmidt, 2012, p. 18). *Music and me* is also a strong criticism of Pasifika youth's socioeconomic conditions. Plays like *Music and me*, that are written by second- and third-generation Pasifika immigrants, became more frequent. These plays reveal the long term effects of migration. According to Chandra, today's Pasifika theatre is about 'dislocation and disenfranchisement. New generations are starting to feel what they may have lost in return for their parents' dreams of better futures' (CHA3). There is a move towards recognising loss, which explains the popularity of *Tautai*, *Vula* and *Kingdom of Lote*.

##### **4.5.2 Tautai and Tokelauan on stage**

*Tautai* (2010), by Tokelauan–New Zealander playwright Iaheto Ah Hi and directed by Oscar Kightley, is the first Tokelauan play performed in New Zealand. The play tells the coming of age story of an urban Tokelauan boy, incorporating elements of modern culture such as video gaming and pop

music. It also uses Pacific mythology and storytelling, which is especially noticeable in its poetic style. The characters speak both English and Tokelauan.

#### **4.5.3 Stories of different generations**

Justine Simeai Barton directed *Lena*, a play by Jason Greenwood about a family in Samoa in 1940s. Even though Simeai Barton established the first Pasifika theatre company, and was active in theatre for over thirty years, she had difficulties staging *Lena* (Herrick, 2007). She explained that funding agencies support second and third generation's stories and do not see stories such as *Lena* as relevant. Anton Carter, from Creative New Zealand, reinforced Simeai Barton's general statement, and emphasised that young people's stories are in demand (CAR\_A). However, *Lena* was a success, which highlights that the audience is interested in pre-migration Pacific stories<sup>38</sup>.

#### **4.5.4 Electric Koko Zoids**

Electric Koko Zoids is a comedy troupe similar to the Brownies, The Naked Samoans, and The Laughing Samoans. Its nine members established the company because they could not find acting work after they graduated from drama school. Electric Koko Zoids started with sketches, which were later made into a production. Aumua, a member of the company, argued that there is a fundamental difference in humour from previous comedy troupes, as Electric Koko Zoids have 'smarter, intelligent jokes' (AMU). Nevertheless, their shows combine dance, singing, and humour, which, similar to other troupes, mock ethnic differences and stereotypes. Their first show, *South Pacific Games* (2008) won the Best Newcomers award in the New Zealand Comedy Festival (Stephens, 2010). For their next show, *E.K.Z.TV*, the company relied on pop culture parodies and Pasifika in-jokes. Aumua described the troupe's work and his own forthcoming plays as influenced by a double vision: 'there are heaps of New Zealand-born Islanders here, but they have their own stories. Because we are torn between two cultures: at home Pacific Islander, outside is the outside world' (AMU).

#### **4.5.5 Banana Boat**

Banana Boat is an initiative, started by Playmarket and coordinated by Jenni Heka and David Mamea, which develops new Maori and Pasifika playwrights. Jenni Heka explained that at first Playmarket and Banana Boat provided a holistic approach to Pasifika theatre's development. While Playmarket was involved as an agency, script advisory and publishing service, Banana Boat developed scripts and provided the necessary experience writers needed to have their scripts performed. The training included workshops, mentoring, and presentations. In 2011, Banana Boat became independent from Playmarket, and today it encourages playwrights to take a holistic approach to theatre practise.

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<sup>38</sup> Notable exception for pre-migration story: Kneubuhl's *Think of a Garden*

Playwrights can try acting, producing and directing to learn how a production works. Banana Boat participants are able to develop their writing and networks as they receive mentoring and scriptwriting advice from leading playwrights such as Albert Belz, Victor Rodger, Stuart Hoar, Stan Wolfgramm, Diana Fuemana, and James Wilson (MAI, RIL, AUM, HEK).

#### **4.6 Theatre by Pasifika women**

A definite new branch of Pasifika theatre is theatre by women. While in the early years of Pasifika theatre there were virtually no Pasifika women playwrights, by the end of the 1990s the first women playwrights had emerged, and since the mid-2000s they increased in number and prominence. Practitioners I interviewed pointed out that in the past there have not been enough stories about Pasifika women by Pasifika women (MUA\_T; CHA; AVI). Plays by women playwrights move beyond the stereotypes of Pasifika women as Polynesian mothers, and hesitant teenagers, to portray a diverse range of complex personalities, that range from career women, homosexuals, single mothers, rebels, and 'sluts' (UNA). Simultaneously, the plays draw attention to social issues, such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, addictions, illness, and motherhood. The performances are primarily based on Western realist theatre but some of the most formally innovative and experimental Pasifika theatre was created by women. Simultaneously, the plays use humour aimed at women and characters women can identify with to target a new audience market of young Pasifika women.

##### **4.6.1 Solos**

Numerous shows were solo performances, such as Diana Fuemana's, Tusiata Avia's work and plays from the *Conchus Season*, which highlight the limitations of the industry. A one-person show can tour more easily and it requires fewer resources and fewer trained actresses, which, as participants noted, were often scarce (MUA\_M, NAW). The shows are often semi-autobiographical and personal, and so writer-performers argue that the plays suit solo shows better. Solo performances, according to a difference approach and to feminist interpretations of monodrama, decolonise theatre because the performer can enact different fluid identities through which she resists the colonial notions of fixed identity (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996; Parker, 2007). The shifting, fluid, and hybrid identities performed draw attention to stereotypical and dominant forms of representation by the 'Other', and finally subvert them. Solos can also signify New Zealand's transition from a mono-cultural to a multicultural framework by enacting characters from different ethnicities (Peterson, 2007).

##### **4.6.2 Makerita Urale: Frangipani Perfume**

The first Pasifika play written by a woman writer for an all-female cast was *Frangipani Perfume* (1998) by Makerita Urale, a well-known theatre maker, documentary maker, and producer who

started her career at Pacific Underground (Carter, 2002; O'Donnell, 2004; Urale & Fuemana, 2004). *Frangipani Perfume* started the trend of Pasifika women's theatre by disrupting existing dominant male authorship in Pasifika theatre. The play's first production was at BATS (Wellington) directed by Ifopo and later the play toured widely, including national and international productions in Canada, Australia, and the UK. The play became part of university and theatre curricula after being published in 2004.

*Frangipani Perfume* is a comedy that explores the contrast between the reality and dreams of Pasifika women. The dreams, such as longing for Samoa and romantic daydreams, help the main characters to escape from their everyday life. Frangipani's<sup>39</sup> smell is linked to Samoa's romantic and dream-like image, and it is contrasted with the stench of toilet-cleaning liquids that is part of three sisters' everyday life. The three sisters are consumed by looking after their father, and their jobs as cleaners. They are different characters; one is more conservative and wanted a white wedding. The other is lesbian, trying to resist Pasifika patriarchal values and the dominance of European society. The youngest sister is bookish, and because she has never been to Samoa, she imagines the island as romantic and idyllic. The play explores the dual world they live in: one moment they perform a Samoan dance to classical music, a moment later, they are back to scrubbing floors. The play questions Pasifika women's stereotypes as dusky maidens and passive traditional women of the Pacific by showing their thoughts, feelings, humour, and life. Frangipani's symbol and smell connects their memories and images of Samoa to the present. Frangipani perfume is a rite of passage, because the sisters come to terms with their identity while remembering how their mother made the perfume. While the play continues the trend of immigrant stories, it is innovative because it explores the immigration story from women's perspective. The poetry, lyrics, and visual presentations rely on Pacific traditions and distinguish the play from previous plays.

#### **4.6.3 Diana Fuemana**

Diana Fuemana is a Niuean-New Zealander playwright and theatre maker, whose plays were performed in New Zealand and internationally since 1999. Fuemana is unique, because she is one of the only female playwrights writing for second and third-generation Pasifika people in New Zealand (CHA).

*Mapaki* (1999), Diana Fuemana's first play, is a one-woman show, which Fuemana first performed in Wellington's Bats Theatre. *Mapaki* also toured internationally across the United States and in Greece. Although the show is a one-woman play, the cast can be expanded to seven, if the main

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<sup>39</sup> Frangipani is a flower

character's voice is performed by two actresses and additional dancers and party-goers are added (Urale & Fuemana, 2004). The word *Mapaki* means 'broken' and the play, similarly to other Pasifika plays, explores the post-colonial condition as an experience of being trapped between positive 'traditional' past and negative present in New Zealand. The main character's, Fisi's positive memories of growing up with her Niuean grandmother are contrasted with her current abusive relationship with her European partner, Jason. To escape the reality of abuse, she escaped to daydreaming, and imagined being pursued by Victor Newman, a character from *Days of Our Lives*, an American soap opera. Formally, *Mapaki* combines pop-culture references with Niuean traditions, which signal pop culture's growing influence and a move away from the Pan-Pasifika approach.

*Jingle Bells* (2001) is a comedy written as a reaction to contemporary Europeans' image of Pasifika women, which Fuemana encountered while performing *Mapaki* in Greece. The stereotype she was faced with is 'romantic, and straight out of a Gauguin painting – all submissive brown girl, with long, flowing hair', and she wanted to create more realistic representations ("The mother of all dramas," 29 August 2001). *Jingle Bells* is about three confident and career driven aspiring Pasifika female dancers, who audition for Christmas in the Park 2001. Their characters are contrasted with a stereotype of a traditional Polynesian mother, who prefers her daughter to abandon her quest for fame and success in arts and the show business, and go to university or work at a factory instead. *Jingle Bells* is a mixture of family oriented humour, and what Fuemana termed 'girl humour', which emphasises women's voices in the play ("The mother of all dramas," 29 August 2001). Family humour and stories about careers and choices have proved successful in Pasifika theatre before, but the 'girl' humour and women's voice are a new addition to Pasifika theatre. *Jingle Bells* highlighted that, although theatre in New Zealand was male-dominated, there was a new generation of trained actresses available, who can play these roles, and that there is a demand from the audience for it.

*The Packer*, a solo written as part of the author's master's thesis, was performed in Wellington, in Australia, and in Edinburgh (Fuemana, 2008). The play explores racial and sexual tensions in nine scenes through Pina's story. Pina is a Niuean girl who refuses the victim role, which is dictated by her environment and by the stereotypes her character resembles. Similarly to *Bare*, *Niu Sila*, and *Mapaki*, the performer had to switch between clearly defined and separate characters that have different ethnicities, such as Charlene, 'Auckland white-trash slut', Diptanshu 'Indian taxi driver... nervous... [with] a thick accent', a few Australians, and a Niuean family (Fuemana, 2008). Fuemana's plays capitalised on the versatility of Pasifika actors, and on their strength in physical comedy. *The Packer* explores the stereotypes and the tensions between ethnicities, and at the same time, it presents an escape story from being a victim in contemporary multicultural Auckland.

*My Mother Dreaming* (2005) is about three generations of women negotiating their relationships, identity, and place in the Niuean-New Zealand society. The three women feel like outsiders in their communities because they have not come to terms with their identities yet. Lisa, the middle generation, had mental illness and she was a single mother, two identities that further complicate her position in her community. The play deals with religion's role in Pasifika people's lives and with social issues such as violence, sexual abuse, drinking.

*Falemalama*, a semi-biographical solo performance performed by Diana Fuemana, was commissioned by and premiered in Pangea World Theater in Minneapolis (Fuemana, 2008). It was originally performed as a solo, but similarly to *Mapaki*, several actors can perform it. A play, based on the author's experiences as a mother, is about Falemalama, a girl born in American Samoa, who migrated to New Zealand in the 1970s and left her family behind. Falemalama struggles with guilt and displacement, known to many first generation immigrants. Another character is Fale's daughter, Tien, who is the storyteller. *Falemalama*, similarly to Fuemana's other plays, explores immigration, search for identity, displacement and being a woman in a migrant, post-colonial, and indigenous context. *Falemalama*, however, is unique because it describes historical events and social context in New Zealand through Pasifika people's eyes in detail.

#### **4.6.4 Nina Nawalowalo**

Nina Nawalowalo, Fijian-New Zealand playwright, received most of her training and theatre experiences in physical theatre and puppetry in Europe. *Vula* (2005), Nawalowalo's first piece, is a visual theatre piece that explores the relationship between Pasifika women and the sea.

Nawalowalo described the water as the woman's domain, where women wash clothes, fish, and interact (NAW). Nawalowalo got interested in the relationship between women's lives and the sea when she went to Fiji. She then observed and explored Fijian life and traditions. The performance presented stories, images, and movement synchronised with the rhythm of the sea. The sea was also present physically: the stage was flooded with water that was disturbed, smoothed, and splashed around by the three main characters. *Vula* had a multiethnic cast, including Maori and Pasifika actresses, whose cultural background enriched the performance, said Nawalowalo (NAW). The pieces were developed one-to-one with the director and became personal by using the actress' experiences. Pacific notions of time connected to Fijian life's rhythm, light, and atmosphere were important to *Vula*'s structure and visual imagery. Another theme was the image of women in the Pacific. The play challenged the colonial objectification of women with the image of the warrior woman, whose body expressed strength and was not a sexualised object. *Vula*'s importance in

Pasifika theatre's development lies in the experimentation with different genres, women's representation, and the Pacific imagery.

Nawalowalo established the Conch Theatre (Conch), which was the first Pasifika visual theatre<sup>40</sup> in New Zealand. The Conch's first productions were performed in the *Conchus Season* (2009), which gave opportunity to three young Pasifika and Maori playwrights to present their work. The plays were *Yalewa* by Kasaya Manulevu, *Te Puea Some Things Can't Be Healed by Bandages* by Princess Te Puea Whioke, and *Te Mahara —The Memory* by Kristyl Noho. The performance displayed different theatre forms and perspectives of Pasifika women's stories. These stories, as Nawalowalo explained, focus on social issues and ask the audience to be conscious about social issues (NAW). A mix of styles and themes provide opportunities for the young artists to explore the themes that interested them. *Yalewa* is a puppetry about a girl who moves from Kadavu in Fiji to Porirua in New Zealand. *Some Things Can't Be Healed by Bandages* is a physical theatre piece that explores domestic violence. In *Te Mahara- The Memory* the performer played fifteen characters to explore the impact of the grandmother's Alzheimer's disease on a family's life. These are taboo topics that need to be paid attention to, as Nawalowalo pointed out: 'the issues of abuse [are] very real, very big and they're under the surface, so to talk about them is really great (NAW). Besides its social agenda, *The Conchus Season* provided opportunities for development for young theatre makers.

#### 4.6.5 Leilani Unasa

Leilani Unasa, a theatre maker, playwright, producer, and director, wrote *Tautala*, *Her Mother's Son*, and *You got Bush*. She also founded Chickenhead Productions with Kylie Brown to display Maori and Pasifika work.

*Tautala* (2003), Unasa's first play, is about three women who explored their life stories while in a Karaoke bar. The characters are based on stereotypes, more than on individuals, pointed out Unasa (UNA). The play explores different women's lives in New Zealand, and characters include a homosexual woman from a conservative family, a woman in an abusive relationship and the 'typical slut/whore character' (UNA). The third character is also important in Tusiata Avia's, and Fuemana's work, and it is seen by the writers as someone who challenges society's rules (AVI; UNA).

Consequently, the characters are associated with women's empowerment, which echoes the rhetoric of third-wave feminism. Third wave feminist and post-colonial discourses both negate the idea of an essentialised womanhood, a collective identity based on a similar experience and

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<sup>40</sup> Visual theatre is often grouped together with physical theatre. These forms have an emphasis on embodied experiences, lighting, movement, and other visual effects. Visual theatre moves away from the strictly drama- and textual script- oriented theatre traditions.



emphasise class, race and other factors that can make these experiences different. Therefore, the discourse of sluts is interpreted as an acknowledgement of diversity and empowerment within these discourses (Anderlini-D'Onofrio, 2003; Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Tanenbaum, 1999). Both Unasa and Avia create within this framework and draw attention to diversity of women's experiences in the Pasifika – New Zealand setting. The characters in these plays go beyond stereotypes, such as Gauguinian sex objects or the Polynesian matriarchs, to which previous Pasifika plays are restricted. *Tautala* has similar themes to other Pasifika plays, because as the stories unfold, the character's individual stories reveal social issues, such as domestic violence and prejudice, and a search for identity.

*His Mother's Son*, Unasa's second play, reveals social and personal issues that complicate a family's life; the issues include addiction and its effects, generational gap, and relationships between family members. Writer, Leilani Unasa, argued that 'most families are dysfunctional in some way. It is fun to laugh at other people's crazy families and I want to continue this fine tradition' ("His mother's son," 2007). While the comedy raises serious questions, Unasa explained that her theatre is also therapeutic and empowering: and the 'audience [should] come away with the belief that nothing is too big to fix no matter how mad your family is' ("His mother's son," 2007).

#### **4.6.6 On a Different Shelf (2008)**

*On a Different Shelf* (2008), a comedy by Sandra Kailahi directed by Katrina Chandra, is about a year in the life of four Pasifika women's lives in their thirties. The title plays on the saying 'left on the shelf', meaning unmarried. The play explores the complexities of searching for love, sex, marriage and men, and dealing with expectations and judgement from society. The play questions what it is like to be single as a 'thirty something' Pasifika woman in New Zealand, which as an informant pointed out, is a serious and complicated issue for women like herself (Anonymous 8, 2010). *On a Different Shelf's* central theme, similarly to *Angels* and *Four women*, is friendship and relationships between the four women, but it also uses 'girl humour', like Fuemana's plays. The themes follow previous Pasifika plays by women including clashing traditions and expectations, and a quest for happiness and relationships.

#### **4.6.7 Tusiata Avia**

Tusiata Avia is a performance poet, whose poems often feature Pasifika women and social issues. Avia has a clear political and social intention; she aims to be an advocate for those whose voices are not heard (AVI). *Wild Dogs Under my Skirt* is a solo show in which she played six characters, including the characters of the 'slut' and the abused woman (Avia, 2002). She explores their lives, feelings and their place in society. An important element in Avia's poetry is 'Va', a 'void or gap that both

separates and connects' (Wright, 2011). Va according to Wendt is 'what we think is an empty space between us is what links us' and other descriptions include a space what one feels rather than sees, a body's relationship, and the world or the place in which people interact in meaningful ways (Tauoma, 2002) (Mila-Schaaf, 2006; Neill, 1992, p. 195). In Samoan tradition, Va is a combination of on interaction and reciprocity and for Tongans it is characterised by harmony and reciprocity (Ka'ili, 2008). In Avia's work, identity is gained through connection with others, the living or the ancestors and the theatre space is liminal place of ritual as described by Smith (2010). Avia takes up the translator's role between cultures, frictions, languages but also between lives of women. She allows the audience to connect to the characters and their essence through the liminal space created in performance.

#### **4.6.8 Pani and Pani**

Pani and Pani is one of the first female Pasifika comedy duos in New Zealand in the mainstream comedy circuit. Its members are Anapela Polataivao and Goretti Chadwick, and one of their first performances was in Kila Kokonut Krew's *Strictly Brown*. The comedy uses popular culture, a style similar to fale 'aitu, and Western comedy. The characters play on women's and Pasifika women's stereotypes. Their performance in the New Zealand International Comedy Festival (2010), *Phat Chix in the Settee*, targeted consumerism, ethnic differences, relationships, and topics that are relevant to women's lives in New Zealand. In *Phat Chix in the Settee* the two comedians present self-confident Pasifika women, who do not shy away from gossip, exercise crazes and discussing boyfriends. These comic characters are stereotypes that showed a curbed mirror to society by highlighting the differences between *Sex and the City's* and Pasifika women's worlds.

## Chapter 5: Pasifika theatre and social transformation

Theatre is a form of knowledge, it should and can also be a means of transforming society.

Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.

(Boal, 1992, p. xxxi)

Theatre *can* help build the future, and is a means of transforming society, claims Augusto Boal. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, theatre makers and critics were divided by this question: what is the purpose of theatre? An essential part of the practice of theatre has gone beyond the aesthetic, whether the purpose be ritual, entertainment, religious or political. The following section provides a brief historical overview of the relevant works that have considered the purpose of theatre. The rest of the chapter then explores the questions: what do practitioners consider their 'community', what is the purpose of Pasifika theatre, whom do practitioners consider to be the main agents of transformation, and how do Pasifika communities influence Pasifika theatre practitioners' creative processes?

The history of theatre reveals that theatre has long been political in nature. For example, in ancient Greek theatre adaptations of myths and parables reconstructed history, and negotiated morals and rules. The expansion of Athens led to the export of Greek art, including theatre, which became a tool of colonisation. Thus theatre promoted Athenian cultural identity (A. J. Graham, 2001; John, 2001; Tsetschladze, 1998). Greek theatre incorporated multiple functions: ritual and entertainment as well as the expression of socio-political ideas (McDonald & Walton, 2007). The social purpose of theatre continued throughout its history, but it was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the role of the artist and consequently the purpose of theatre became a fundamental question.

The debate on the purpose of theatre did not question whether theatre could serve multiple purposes, but rather focused on the importance of a social agenda. One side advocated that the artist should stay away from normative and didactical messages and offer a testimony instead - in other words, theatre was not considered a place for politics. Ionesco's reply to Tynan, the

British theatre critic who described him as an 'advocate of anti-theatre', exemplifies this argument:

But to deliver a message to the world, to wish to direct its course, to save it, is the business of the founders of religions, of the moralists or the politicians [...] A playwright simply writes plays, in which he can offer only a testimony, not a didactic message... any work of art which was ideological and nothing else would be pointless [...] inferior to the doctrine it claimed to illustrate, which would already have been expressed in its proper language, that of discursive demonstration. (Esslin, 1968, p. 126)

Theatre as free from ideology and political agenda is a 'prefiguring of a post-modernist position' - a view which did not receive unanimous support in the intensely ideological atmosphere of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Scott, 2006, p. 214). There were myriads of other practitioners who believed that theatre should be free from ideology, nevertheless because of the well-known debate between Ionesco and Tyler, in this thesis their stance is represented by Ionesco. While the theatre of the absurd denounced the images of the artist as a leader and the theatre as a tool for social improvement, other practitioners considered the transformation important. 'You must smash to smithereens the myth of an apolitical art', wrote Mayakovsky, who was strongly influenced by Marxism (L Richards, 2003, p. 189). The most famous advocate of theatre with a social purpose was another Marxist, Bertold Brecht, who condemned theatre as a bourgeois art form, and advocated that theatre should move away from emotional identification - both in methods and in ideology. Unlike the Stanislavskian school, Brecht opposed the idea of catharsis and emotional identification with the character. What others described as psychological, Brecht recognised as an essentially social condition. In his view, the purpose of theatre was to raise a similar awareness in his audience. In a letter he wrote: 'the works now written are coming more and more to lead towards that great epic theatre which corresponds to the sociological situation' (Brecht, 1957, p. 21). He stated that theatre is supposed to bring forth change, not just entertain and provide aesthetic pleasure. To achieve the desired effect, Brecht proposed methodological changes including a dismissal of the linear narrative and the actors' identification with the characters. This way, he argued, the audience would not connect with the performance by identifying with the characters' personal motivations and drives. Brechtian theatre alienated spectators from purely emotional identification, seeking instead to engage them in understanding social situations and realising the need for social change. As Völker pointed out, 'theatre cannot create political change, it can only represent it. Brecht hoped that his audience would critically consider their attitudes toward political realities' (Völker, 1979, p. 432). In epic

theatre, for instance, events were moved by the world outside the character: social, economic and political. Walter Benjamin in *What is epic theatre?* pointed out that 'epic appeals to an interest group which "does not think without a cause"' (Benjamin, 1970, p. 302). In contrast to the tradition of Aristotle's tragic theatre, which dominated European theatre especially from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and in which the tragic vision cannot be controlled or changed, in the epic theatre the vision is changeable and is there to be changed (Steer, 1968). Brecht's theatre combined political, aesthetic and entertaining elements; and as Benjamin pointed out, it targeted a specific educated and involved audience, but unlike Athenian theatre was not for the masses. By incorporating these changes in methods, Brecht changed theatre in order to change society; as he put it, 'art is not a mirror to hold up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it' (McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p. 79).

The question of whom theatre serves and on whose behalf it should practise was not exclusive to Marxist theatre makers. Augusto Boal, the Brazilian theatre maker, echoes Brecht's criticism and describes the development of theatre in five stages, moving from a community event based on equality to the division established by the aristocracy that separated the elite from the masses. While the bourgeois changed the protagonists, the division prevailed, and Brecht reacted by making the characters objects. The fifth stage, Theatre of the Oppressed, is seen this way by Boal: 'first the barrier between actors and spectators is destroyed, all must act, all must be protagonists in the necessary transformation of society. [...] Then the barrier between protagonists and choruses is destroyed' (Boal, 1992, p. ix). Theatre of the Oppressed is didactic and dialectic. Boal developed 'Brechtian arguments of the text, where the case of for and against points brought up was presented in contrapuntal style, with music (and lyrics) that distanced, commented on and complemented textual arguments' (Schwarz in (Damasceno, 1996, p. 141). Boal's theatre aims to engage the public, create a spect-actor based on Freire's ideas of 'consciencisation', allowing the audience members to become active participants in the theatre process and use theatre not only to realise social problems but also as a tool for problem solving. This theatre focuses on political, economic, educational, and social issues as well as therapeutic practices, helping the audience to recognise a problem and find solutions. Theatre makers see themselves as active participants in social transformation, and the performers and audience together recognise issues, generating ideas and solutions. Thus while some theatre practitioners, like Ionesco, believed that theatre can only represent the social

world, others believed that, as Marx wrote, 'The philosophers only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is however, to change it' (Engels & Marx, 1996).

Do Pasifika theatre practitioners seek to reflect or reshape society? In case of Pasifika theatre a central question is whether they actively seek to change society: does change happen apart from the artist, or is it actively constructed in Pasifika theatre? In this chapter, I argue that there is a contradiction between practitioners' claim to use theatre to change society and the 'testimony'<sup>41</sup> offered by Pasifika theatre.

### **5.1 What do theatre practitioners do for their communities, and why?**

Cohen in his overview of scholarship on 'community' pointed out that community 'seems to simultaneously imply both similarity and difference.' It is a relational idea: 'the opposition of one *community* to others or to other social entities' (Cohen, 1985, p. 12). Pasifika theatre artists, in line with Cohen's definition, define their communities in terms of ethnic boundaries, most notably by difference from Europeans and the Maori. To use a metaphor, their identification with their communities is like the layers of an onion. Two 'layers' of community are discussed below: the broader Pasifika community, and identification with a narrower ethnic heritage. The practitioners kept the community of New Zealand in mind, but identification only figured when actors were outside the national boundaries in the interviews.

Pasifika theatre practitioners define belonging to the Pasifika community in terms of difference from the Maori. They see Maori as the dominant ethnicity owing to their politically recognised indigeneity. Since the 1980s to mid-1990s, when Pasifika actors often played Maori roles, casting conventions have changed drastically. Ifopo recalled that during her time in Puawai and Pacific Underground, Pasifika actors 'mainly played Maori or dark [roles], hardly ever Islanders' (IFO). At this time, Maori and Pasifika theatre were often grouped together; in fact, Pasifika theatre emerged in order to tell stories. Contemporary casting of Maori roles is radically different in that Pasifika actors tend not to be cast at all, and if they are, they are heavily criticised. Maiava highlighted how this change had occurred: 'we had this judgment thing coming, and society will sometimes go, what's a Samoan actor doing a Maori role, they should not make it like that' (MAI). Such change indicates that Maori and Pasifika theatre have parted, and the politicisation of Maori ethnicity has limited Pasifika theatre practitioners' options. In the

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<sup>41</sup> Ionesco's term

end, Pasifika artists have distinguished themselves from the Maori, and told Pasifika stories. The separation has led to a point of no return, because today they could not play Maori roles even if they wanted to due to the politicisation of ethnicity both among audiences and professionals, as explained above.

Maori and Pasifika people are not entirely divided, and the myth of kinship-based solidarity continues to thrive. The more intimate portrayal of Maori-Pasifika relations is based on familiarity with Maori cultures. Practitioners often describe the Maori as connected to Pasifika people through unquestioned mythic ancestry, which results in a symbolic kinship between Pasifika people and their 'Maori brothers and sisters' (MUA\_T). Maori-Pasifika solidarity is often idealised: the narrator in Fuemana's play *Falemalama* describes 'overwhelming support of the indigenous peoples, the Maoris, sprung into place. They protested against the dawn raids on their cousins from the South Pacific' (Fuemana, 2008, p. 69). During interviews, practitioners hardly mentioned the Maori without emphasising the strength of this solidarity. This positive pattern is however contradicted by the portrayal of Maori in plays such as *Romeo and Tusi* and *Once Were Samoans*. In these plays Pasifika–Maori relations bear a resemblance to siblings' fights rather than to harmony, and the theme of overwhelming support is replaced by ethnic conflict. Pasifika theatre practitioners portray ethnic conflict in a less politically correct manner, which at the same time suggests intimacy between the two ethnic groups. Maori are jokingly portrayed as lazy, untrustworthy gamblers and troublemakers, strikingly similar to the portrayal of Pasifika people in the same plays. The likeness and intimate portrayal of Maori is most likely a result of shared social spaces.

Nevertheless, participants' descriptions of greetings revealed that familiarity with Maori culture does not necessarily equal similarity. Tanya Muagututi'a proudly pointed out that Pasifika people greet their guests informally as opposed to the 'Maori, who formally do it' (MUA\_T). Surprisingly, practitioners do not comment beyond observations, even when asked directly. Moreover, the participant did not answer the question as to whether differences between contemporary Pasifika and Maori greetings are the result of a loss of Pasifika heritage, or perhaps the formalisation of Maori rituals. Cultural differences between Maori and Pasifika in the interviews appeared implicit, taken for granted. Thus, Maori are seen as the Other by Pasifika people through politicisation of ethnicity and cultural differences. However, the process

of othering is mitigated by the discourse of kinship-based solidarity and a reluctance to dwell on differences.

Perhaps differences were not articulated because of practitioners' reluctance to break with political correctness when off stage (ANO1; IFO; MUA\_M; MUA\_T; RIL). A participant repeatedly broke off attempts to contrast Pasifika traditions with those of the Maori or Europeans, commenting that she did not 'know about the Maori and the Palangi' (ANO1). A comment about fashion is indicative of her reluctance to comment on cultural differences: 'we wore socks and high heels' and 'we were taught to cover up,' recalled the participant, before adding: 'but I do not know about the Maori and the Palangi' (ANO1). It is hard to imagine that growing up in an urban European neighbourhood, steeped in the popular media, she was unaware of what other ethnic groups were wearing. By refusing to comment on the attire of others, and by implication judging either European or Maori culture, the participant avoided any possible charges of cultural insensitivity. That is not to say her opinions about other cultures were negative, but even the refusal to judge may be construed as a form of judgment or censure.

Such reluctance to pass judgment about Maori appeared in several interviews, but practitioners I interviewed treated differences between Pasifika and European people with less caution. Polataiavo remembered her time in a European-dominated drama school and concluded that humility 'separates us Islanders from Europeans' (POL). What did Polataiavo mean by humility? She defined it as always taking care of others first. Here there is no reluctance to comment on ethnicities, as Pasifika culture is set apart, which may be seen in the light of collectivist Pasifika culture in contrast to the individualist European culture.

Pacific Island cultures are traditionally seen as collectivist (Linnekin & Poyer, 1990, p. 8; McLaughlin & Braun, 1998). 'Collectivist culture' and 'collectivism' are used in this study to describe a 'society in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty' (Hofstede, 1994, p. 261). Collectivism is important in Pasifika theatre, a trait which practitioners emphasise. Heka contrasted European practitioners to Pasifika ones, who 'work differently' because they 'have [their] own goals, but also the goals of the community' (HEK). Superficially, collectivism may only describe the collaborative working style employed by companies such as The Naked Samoans and Pacific Underground. These troupes share tasks, and collaborate during every stage of the theatre making process.



Practitioners often used collectivism to differentiate between European and Pasifika people. Echoing Geert Hofstede's definition that in individualistic societies 'everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family', Europeans are described by practitioners in terms of lacking 'humility' and 'their centre [which] sits differently inside of them' (POL) (Hofstede, 1994, p. 51). It is evident that in Polataiavo's statement there is a value judgment, as lack of kindness is necessarily negative. Humility, based on collectivism, on the one hand is a positive trait that 'separates [...] Islanders, from Europeans' (POL). Humility, described as a trait of collectivist cultures, implies that Europeans are less caring; by implication, the Pasifika culture is seen as superior. Equally, though, characteristics of Samoan culture such as 'humility', 'humbleness', and 'putting others first' are cited as obstacles to achieving success in a European-dominated New Zealand (POL). Therefore, Pasifika practitioners' normative judgment is twofold; they simultaneously see collectivism as an asset and a burden. Nevertheless, humility is a concept Polataiavo employed to differentiate between Europeans and Pasifika people. As argued above, practitioners distinguished Pasifika and European cultures in their fundamental values and thus reinforced Pasifika people as distinct from European people on such a basic level that Europeans are necessarily seen as the Other.

However, while Pasifika theatre practitioners only implied differences between Pasifika and the Other (Maori and European), they were willing to explicitly distinguish themselves from Maori and Europeans in their position in New Zealand. Indicative of this willingness is one participant's comment that New Zealand is 'not our native land', 'we are visitors here' (MUA\_T). One participant explained Pasifika people's in-between state by arguing that Pasifika people 'are not Maoris, and not white' and they 'deal with Maori and Pakeha' 'from sitting on the fence' (MAN). Pasifika people's liminal position is illustrated with a picture of a house surrounded by a fence. The practitioner felt that while Maori and Europeans are inside, Pasifika people are positioned on the boundaries between inside and outside, which hardly equals an insider status. Thus, Pasifika people see themselves as outsiders, defined against Europeans and Maori who are unquestioningly accepted as insiders. The Pasifika view of the self as an outsider or a visitor may explain why themes of migration figure so prominently in Pasifika people's lives. Migration appears in almost every Pasifika play, and drives the narrative of the interviews. However, if migration is the source of difference between insiders and outsiders, why are Europeans and

Maori, who previously migrated to New Zealand,<sup>42</sup> never portrayed as visitors or outsiders? To understand the Pasifika view of the self as an outsider, it is essential to be familiar with the political climate of New Zealand. NZ's dominant bicultural system advocates Maori and European interests and the so-called 'new' migrants, e.g. from the Pacific Islands or Asia, are treated as part of a multicultural society. While cultural rights in New Zealand have been incorporated in policies, Pasifika languages and cultures are largely absent in the school system. Pasifika theatre practitioners speak of themselves as visitors not because they view their stay in NZ as temporary; instead, the term articulates a perception of not quite feeling at home, of still not belonging. In a way, then, their perception of Europeans and Maori as the Other is more explicitly tied to their feeling of Pasifika people being othered in New Zealand, a reaction to the social and political atmosphere of New Zealand society.

In the social hierarchy Pasifika people rank well below the Maori and Europeans. Manusaute explained that New Zealand is 'white men territory. [It is] white men first, Maori next, then brown men, Islanders. No matter what they claim, that is how it runs' (MAN). In this manner, Europeans and Maori are categorised as 'them', which reinforces the previously discussed division. Although Manusaute's view may be limited to South Auckland communities, and it is without doubt one of the most radical statements that occurred in the interviews, there is no escaping the fact that Pasifika practitioners are disappointed by Pasifika people's standing in New Zealand.

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<sup>42</sup> Maori indigeneity is a matter of popular debate. Some argue that the Maori who arrived in NZ in the 13<sup>th</sup> century wiped out the Morioris in New Zealand, and therefore they are not indigenous. This view is opposed by those who say that the Morioris were a Maori tribe, or that they were restricted to the Chatham Islands. Nevertheless, most people argue that Maori are the indigenous population in NZ. However, Pasifika theatre practitioners did not engage with the debate in any way and univocally accepted the Maoris' indigenous status.

Other ethnic groups were only mentioned twice during interviews;<sup>43</sup> this illustrates how dominantly the Maori and Europeans figure as the ‘Other’. That is not to say that other ethnicities are wholly overlooked – a number of recent plays by Kila Kokonut Krew, Toa Fraser and Diana Fueamana feature multi-ethnic characters who occupy the same socio-economic status as Pasifika characters. Nonetheless, it is clear that practitioners I interviewed mark the Pan-Pasifika community boundary principally in contrast to Maori and European communities.

In line with a post-migrant double vision, second and third generation practitioners problematised their positioning. They felt they belonged both to Pasifika communities and to New Zealand. However, as further discussed in Chapter 7, they invariably added that Pasifika identification was more important to them: ‘we, New Zealand born Samoans, [are a] different generation, but at heart [we are] Pacific Islanders’ (AUM). Thus, Pasifika communities are not only the primary point of identification for first generation practitioners: they remain relevant for second and third generation practitioners too.

Practitioners’ unanimous identification with the Pasifika community was advantageous for the development of Pasifika theatre. In a larger community, more practitioners can emerge and there is a larger pool of possible audience members. Such Pan-Pasifika ideology can also explain why the term ‘Pasifika theatre’ was embraced by practitioners. Critically, ‘Pacific’ can be attributed to the European generalizing gaze fuelled by the inability to distinguish between different Pasifika ethnicities. Ultimately, though, the term ‘Pasifika theatre’ is accepted among practitioners, as it is ‘the only way to group it’ because Pasifika theatre is such a new phenomenon (NAW).

Beyond the above discussed Pan-Pasifika identification, practitioners also identify with ethnicity-specific communities, such as Samoan and Tongan. In view of the way Samoan practitioners have dominated Pasifika theatre, it is unsurprising that a Samoan identity was often mentioned.

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<sup>43</sup> Chinese and Indians were mentioned on two occasions: ‘You can be Chinese or Indian or Maori or Samoan’ and ‘Chinese, Pasifika [...] theatre may be the future’ (AVI; CAR\_A).

It is fitting to illustrate the importance of Samoan identification with a theatre-related example: when Wendt went to see his own play, *The Songmaker's Chair*, he caught himself reacting as a Samoan, rather than Pasifika (WEN). While this may seem unsurprising, Wendt's repeated emphasis and a sense of discovery in his tone draw attention to just how important his Samoanness is to him. The prevailing dominance of Samoan practitioners is challenged by recent ethnicity-specific plays such as *Vula*, *Kingdom of Lote*, and *Tautai*. Practitioners from a non-Samoan background distinguished their ethnicities as unique and increasingly important in the interviews. Furthermore, solo shows, mandatory in the last year of Toi Whakaari, provided opportunities for students to showcase their unique background. Leota remembered his solo show and proudly explained that 'I spoke Tongan on stage, one of the few times I spoke Tongan in public' (LEO). Such opportunities prompted practitioners to acknowledge their heritage and use Pacific language and cultural elements on stage. These solos are significant because they present a unique opportunity for practitioners to explore their ethnic background on stage.

An outsider's impressions may be useful to illustrate how Pasifika communities have several layers. In 2010 I visited the Pasifika Festival in Auckland; the following notes were taken on the last day of the event.

While the main stage is 'Pasifika', every ethnicity had a separate stage. The stage is in the centre of a number of traders, selling food and touristy things, like Fijian forks and plastic frangipanis. Communities also seem to gather around a stage. Elders are sitting and watching the performance, children are running around. This structure is especially visible for smaller stages. For bigger stages, the community blend in the general audience. (Journal entry, 2010 March 13)

Some significant points from this observation reinforce the previously explored concept of layered identification. While the festival's concept was Pan-Pasifika, every ethnicity had a separate stage. As I walked further in, the diversity beyond Pasifika became visible, which may suggest that there is room for 'ethnicity-specific' identification under the Pan-Pasifika umbrella.

Thus, as the above section shows, Pasifika theatre practitioners' primary identification is indeed based on difference from the Other, who in their descriptions are European and Maori people. Differences are marked by Pasifika people's liminal status, collectivist culture, and hierarchical positioning in New Zealand. Nevertheless, it seems that there is a growing trend to acknowledge practitioners' unique and individual cultural heritage. Thus, such Pan-Pasifika and ethnicity-

specific identifications make it clear that Pasifika theatre practitioners define ‘their communities’ as Pasifika people.

#### **5.1.1 ‘Serving the community’: actively making social change**

Practitioners were, without exception, socially active, claiming the responsibility for changing Pasifika communities through theatre. ‘To transform’ and ‘to challenge’ were two of the most frequently mentioned phrases during the interviews, but the practitioners I interviewed approach social responsibilities on a wide scale, from wanting to free the audience to inspiring the audience to free itself. On one end of the scale, Manusaute compares theatre to essential nourishment that feeds the community, elevating theatre from entertainment to a fundamental need. Kila Kokonut Krew’s manifesto calls for the liberation of Pasifika people from the modern-day slavery of European laws. The company’s main mission was to build and serve the community, hence the mission statement ‘*From the Pacific we rise*’ (MAN). Manusaute wanted to ‘free’ Pasifika people ‘from the chains of the laws we live by’ and he added ‘we are not the kings of the jungle here’ (MAN).

A more moderate goal is to give ‘back to the community’ by performing in schools and community centres (MUA\_M). According to this view, helping the community is an obligation, a moral responsibility, and a social duty. On the opposite end of the scale from Kila Kokonut Krew is a Brechtian desire to change communities. Practitioners wish to use the power of theatre to open the audience’s eyes. The audience, Lees explained, thus shares the practitioners’ responsibility for social change because the audience wants ‘to be part of something, to take responsibility for something’ (LEE). Such theatre, in some ways a Brechtian response, may achieve social change, but the audience is the agent of transformation, as after gaining insight into social problems in the theatre space it then advocates social change. Beyond the rather general umbrella of bringing forth social change, three more specific forms were identified. These forms, as discussed in the following sections, roughly correspond to empowerment, lifting taboos, and education.

#### **5.1.2 Empowering the community**

To bring forth social change through theatre, practitioners want to empower communities. From interviews with Pasifika theatre practitioners, a tripartite model of empowerment can be extracted. This model comprises constructive representation, self-determination of Pasifika people, and providing role models in the community.

With great power comes great responsibility, and practitioners advocate constructive representation to bring forth social change. While practitioners never directly define what constructive representation exactly means to them, the interviews reveal that they want to portray Pasifika people in a positive light to show that Pasifika people can succeed. Manusaute's metaphor shows that for his company, such reversal is a matter of life and death:

I cannot cut the vein, I have to rebuild [the Pasifika audience member]. If I destroy him, I have to raise him again. Brown men have to triumph in whatever I do. That is just me, my voice, I cannot just kill him. (MAN)

Theatre and life are intrinsically connected, because to triumph on stage is to triumph in life. Manusaute thus presents contemporary heroes who overcome difficulties and achieve their goals. These heroes, however, are fallible comic characters who are underprivileged, as in most Pasifika theatre.

Manusaute first argued that plays that target a Pasifika audience should not criticise Pasifika people directly: '[while theatre] could be a vehicle where I can put the brown man up on a stool and dissect him, kill it his spirit, its culture, anything. I cannot do that'. He then added that direct criticism only works for European theatre and European audiences: 'we are not a white theatre, where we can go in that kind of territory' (MAN). Such empowerment is clearly defined in opposition to the Other, and Kila Kokonut Krew, unlike European theatres, sought to empower their Pasifika audience. Such an agenda can be viewed in the light of the post-colonial struggle. On the one hand, direct criticism is deemed inappropriate because overt criticism is simultaneously seen as mimicry of European traditions and a betrayal of Pasifika traditions. On the other hand, a direct link is established between constructive representation and empowerment, which is seen to lead to positive results without practitioners casting any doubt on the theory.

Pasifika theatre, both in general and through constructive representation, may be seen as part of a larger Pacific post-colonial movement of self-determination, which Wendt explains: 'creating our own literature helps us define ourselves in our own terms' (Sharrad, 2003). Accordingly, Pasifika artists and audiences are the agents of their own self-determination. Lees summarised the multiple purposes of theatre as follows:

It's an expression of who we are, what we want, and how we want to be seen. [...] It reflects society and allows us as a community to grow, but it's absolutely true, no

matter how many times you say it. [...] In Pacific theatre it is our purpose to keep knitting ourselves together as a community. (LEE)

The goal of Pasifika theatre is thus dual: it constructs Pasifika identity and uses these identities to 'knit' Pasifika people into a community. Its dual functions are interlinked. Firstly, it is a site of gathering and support; thus it builds communities, and communities that are more 'knit together' gather more and provide more support. Secondly, Pasifika theatre discusses identities and mirrors society; this may inspire change in the audience – change which is then reflected in theatre.

Wendt argued that art leads to self-determination, which in turn leads to self-respect (Wendt, 1976, p. 17). Perhaps more specifically, other practitioners regarded their presence in art and media as a key to self-determination because such presence leads to 'visibility' in the public sphere, which gives the audience a sense of pride in Pasifika cultures. 'Visibility' referred to Pasifika actors being on air, in television, and in theatre, so that Pasifika people could see 'brown faces' there (MAN). Practitioners regarded pride among Pasifika youth as important, 'for future generations: seeing themselves on stage represented is everything' (NAW). Definitions of 'visibility' include positive and neutral representation, but the negative portrayal of Pasifika people in late night news is evidently excluded from these definitions. Such 'positive' visibility has benefited first-generation Pasifika people in addition to Pasifika youth. When the first-generation migrants arrived in New Zealand, they faced an urban landscape, racism, and cultural alienation. There were no Pasifika actors, television shows, or theatre. The first Pasifika theatre companies and actors were important for first-generation immigrants 'because they really wanted to see young Pasifika people out there. They were a little bit proud, because their generation wasn't allowed to be so out, and confident about their PI-ness' (KIG).

Art in itself, as a form of self-expression, fosters self-respect and pride in Pasifika culture and identity; this in turn de-colonises people's minds. As Wendt famously argued, 'this awakening is the first real sign that we are breaking from the colonial chill and starting to find our own beings' (Wendt, 1976, p. 17). Thus, Pasifika theatre may be seen as part of the de-colonisation project because it draws attention to a diversity of experiences and reshapes people's self-image, enabling them to see themselves as equals to the colonisers. Making first-generation Pasifika and Pasifika youth proud of their cultures may be a way to foster self-determination and ensure the survival of Pasifika cultures.

### **Role models**

Especially for Pasifika youth, role models are essential ingredients for pride. 'Just seeing my role models on TV, straight away broke the glass ceiling for me,' remembered Kightley. He then crossed the barrier which he felt still keeps Pasifika people from rising. Role models played an important part in practitioners' development, motivating young artists to continue with theatre, as Millar points out in his article on Pasifika theatre (Millar, 2002). The first Pasifika people on television had a strong effect and caused immediate identification with the actors. In addition, school tours and performances provided role models even in the '70s when there were no Pasifika people on television (LEE). Leilua recalled that her first theatre attendance had motivated her to become an actress, and it made her believe that she too could be successful (LEI). The importance of role models lies in hope. Kightley and Leilua remembered that their role models had made them realise that 'it is possible for people like us' to be successful within and beyond theatre (KIG; LEI).

Television, theatre, and music often overlap in providing role models, especially in Pasifika theatre, where practitioners multitask. The Naked Samoans do television work, and Pacific Underground has produced music and supported emerging musicians. More importantly, second-generation practitioners are conscious of how influential role models are, and strive to set a good example. After the 2009 tsunami in Samoa, Pasifika role models participated in the '*I love the Islands*' benefit concert:

The line-up is impressive; it has Kightley and Lady 6, and a couple other big shots. [...] Interesting mix, stand up is followed by hip-hop, followed by traditional Samoan dance, followed by rap, and the audience seems to enjoy it all. (Journal entry, 20 October 2009)

Leading performing-arts practitioners contributed to the concert, and by giving their time for a good cause these artists affirmed their role-model status. In line with Millar's argument that Pasifika theatre provides role models and empowers communities (Millar, 2002), this event describes a similar dynamic. Throughout their lives role models empowered the practitioners I interviewed, who in turn see Pasifika theatre as an opportunity to empower others.

#### **5.1.3 Raising issues: taboos and social issues**

Pasifika theatre practitioners aim to change society not only by empowering audiences as discussed above but also through including social issues. Lifting 'taboo topics', 'challenging the audience' and 'making problems visible' are recurring references in the interviews. Thus,



'visibility' does not exclude 'difficult subjects'. In fact, some practitioners prefer an open discussion of social issues in the media and theatre rather than silence, because discussions may help to overcome problems in society (NAW).

Practitioners reported that social issues and taboos affecting Pasifika society are like weeds; they felt as though they keep uprooting them, but the weeds grow back in no time. Such social issues include 'issues that would be judged morally wrong' and what 'come[s] up in the paper, especially with child abuse, physical and sexual abuse' (MAI; LEI). Taboos have a normalising function in society, regulating what is socially accepted. The word itself originates from Polynesia and can be linked to Cook's early investigations, where certain kinds of taboos referred to human sacrifices, others to socially unacceptable acts, such as women being forbidden to eat certain foods (Barnard & Spencer, 2002, p. 814). The word is similar to the Maori 'tapu' relating to the traditional *Māori* spiritual and social code. The word's meaning then changed in English. In anthropological works, James Frazer, Brond, and many other social anthropologists used the term when referring to any strong ritual prohibition. Outside the field of social anthropology, 'taboo' has a broader meaning, generally referring to socially unacceptable notions that are kept invisible from the public sphere. Therefore, to 'break taboos' is to work against the status quo in society. In line with this definition, most Pasifika theatre practitioners I interviewed believe that breaking taboos can inspire social change.

It is not surprising then, that most practitioners I interviewed argued that social issues should be included in theatre. However, their motivations for this varied. A number of practitioners noted that they incorporated stories for personal reasons. In addition, practitioners who sought to engender social change cited a sense of social responsibility. They saw theatre as a megaphone which confronts the audience, thinking 'here, it is on stage, we cannot escape, we all know it is happening so let us put an end to it' (LEI). Confronting taboos allowed the silence to be broken, because 'if people are quiet about issues like that, they just sort of continue'(LEI). Thus, theatre makers took up the responsibility to break the silence. Maiava reasoned that social issues should be discussed in theatre because 'we don't know all the stories that happened to all our sisters and aunties because it is a male dominated patriarchal life and society' (MAI). Interestingly, gender was rarely mentioned in the interviews, but when it came up, it related to social responsibility. Maiava's statement, somewhat contradicting its goal to shed light to the wrongdoings of patriarchal society, echoes the traditionally protective role of a patriarchal

society. Furthermore, many of the practitioners I interviewed were motivated by a broader human responsibility to discuss the mistreatment of children (AVI). While motivations varied, and I would not want to engage in generalisations, all but one practitioner I interviewed emphasised that Pasifika theatre should be, and indeed is, a source of social change.

### **Silent actors**

In stark contrast to practitioners' self-positioning as promoters of social change, other institutions such as church, media, and government are seen as passive or unsuccessful in changing taboos. According to the 2006 Census, 8 in 10 Pasifika people consider themselves religious, and the most common denominations among Pasifika people are, in decreasing order, Presbyterian (Congregational and Reformed), Catholic, and Methodist. While Pasifika people from a Samoan, Fijian and Tokelauan background are predominantly Catholic, those with Cook Island Maori, Niuean and Tuvalu Islander ancestry were mainly Presbyterian. For Pasifika people of Tongan ethnicity, the most common religious denomination was Methodist. The fifth most common religion was that of the Latter Day Saints (Statistics New Zealand, 2006 Census). While there are significant differences based on ethnicity, none of the participants in this study specified what they meant by 'the church'. Instead of specific denominations, they emphasised the presence of an institutionalised structure which was part of traditional Pasifika life.

The church is considered a powerful institution and is described as a significant part of Pasifika people's everyday life. Nevertheless, especially early Pasifika plays portrayed it in a negative manner. Ministers, in plays like *Romeo and Tusi* and *Fresh off the Boat*, just want money, 'drive Porsches', and rarely share their insights with the community; instead they manipulate and preach (KIG). In fact, according to the practitioners I interviewed, the church does not do enough with social issues, and is part of an apparatus that keeps social issues seemingly invisible. Leilua argued that people are often well aware of sexual abuse within the community, and she criticised ministers for not intervening: 'so and so with the niece – and nobody talks about it at church' (LEI). In this view, the church evidently takes a stance by staying silent and not using its power. However, while this position is often unnoticed by the community at large, practitioners maintain that they notice shortcomings and highlight the 'crooked' ministers and the silent church.

Unlike the church, the media is thought to cover some social issues, but the practitioners I interviewed emphasised that communities do not internalise its messages and as a result there

is no change. Some practitioners, especially Leilua, Manusaute, Kightley, Avia, and Maiava, argued that for change to happen, it is not enough to break the silence on air; it is essential to acknowledge problems in the community and set transformation in motion. With emphasis on social transformation as a bottom-up process, it is not surprising that theatre which operates within communities is seen as successful in lifting taboos. It is interesting to note that while the church and media are criticised, other institutions, such as the government, international and national organisations, are virtually unmentioned in the interviews. Nevertheless, they are the biggest investors in social development, both in terms of research and financial investment. But if we accept that theatre makers see transformation as a grassroots process, the invisibility of agents like the government implies they have less impact. Their invisibility further shifts the responsibility to theatre makers, who magnify their own role in changing society through theatre by criticising media and other institutions for being ineffective.

While practitioners dismissed media and other institutions because of their outsider status in Pasifika communities, they attributed their own success to their dual position, that is being both insiders and outsiders, in their community. Polataiavo saw her television work as an extension of her insider image in the community and theatre. She ascribed her success in achieving change to being an insider, and she argued that even ‘when people see me on screen, everyone sees me as a part of their wider Pacific community’ (POL). Thus, attachment between members of the community and the actress was thought to lead to increased attendance. Polataiavo also proposed that audience members were more likely to internalise underlying messages in performances, or even commercials due to her insider status. The connection, however, is loosely defined, and examples in the interviews ranged from a symbolic connection within the Pasifika community to connections within the family. Practitioners believed that their insider status, often based on symbolic belonging to Pasifika communities, made them heard. However, they were aware that at the same time, they are outsiders and see larger trends and social issues, because of their position as artists. Perhaps even more importantly, they communicate through theatre, which functions as a megaphone, so their voices can be heard.

### **The curious case of the mirror: portraying social issues**

A question asked at the beginning of this chapter was whether Pasifika theatre is a mirror or a hammer. One possible answer lies in the idea that in Pasifika theatre, portraying social issues is more important than providing solutions. In *Fresh off the Boat*, The Naked Samoans’

productions, and Avia's work, violence, failure, suicide, and displacement are explored. Yet, the focus of works is on revealing social issues; providing solutions and alternatives is secondary. Revelation itself is like showing a mirror to society. Nevertheless, the aim of such mirror images is to change society, argued practitioners, indicating the social themes in plays.

Before we move on to discuss how practitioners construct such mirror images, it may be interesting to note that Pasifika theatre is both elitist and democratic. The elitist element lies in the role of theatre makers in selecting and naming the problems: communities, except in the case of Statement Theatre, are excluded from the selection process. Pasifika theatre is, however, democratic in the sense that audience members and practitioners participate in the theatre space and thus theatre becomes a form of 'collective unloading, so that we, as society, can just move on' (KIG). The 'collective unloading' and the aim to raise awareness of social issues in Pasifika theatre are social and strikingly democratic.

It is thus unexpected that many practitioners name Brecht as one of their main influences,<sup>44</sup> and I argue that such references are symbolic statements designed to emphasise the social role of Pasifika theatre. The reference to Brecht is interesting because he is one of the only Western practitioners mentioned in the interviews, apart from the writers and plays that practitioners had previously worked on. Manusaute, among others, acknowledged that Brecht 'has a lot of effect on my work now' (MAN). Brecht's theatre however is dissimilar to Pasifika theatre in most aspects. Brecht's theatre was social and democratic in the sense that he condemned bourgeois entertainment and aimed to dispose of the fourth wall and emotional identification. However, his theatre had undeniably elitist elements not only because the audience was to experience the author's 'totalising statements', but also because in Brecht's time the alienation effect and expected cognitive responses to a piece presupposed a relatively educated and liberal audience (Lunn, 1982, p. 126). The very basis of alienation is foreign to Pasifika theatre whose audiences are far from Brecht's liberal audience. It is essential for us to grasp Brecht's role in education in order to understand why practitioners refer to him. As part of the Western canon of theatre

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<sup>44</sup> Practitioners frequently argued that they are influenced by fale'aitu (see Chapter 6), and in one instance Boal was mentioned (see Statement Theatre).

history, his work is taught extensively in drama school, workshops, and in high school curricula. Brecht's name is primarily associated with his social agenda, not his methods. Despite the methodological differences which set Pasifika theatre apart from Brechtian theatre, Pasifika practitioners repeatedly cite his name as a symbol of socially engaged theatre – thus emphasising their own goal of fostering social change through theatre.

### **Deconstructing stereotypes**

While practitioners talked about changing society through theatre primarily in generalisations, their attempts to re-sketch images of Pasifika people in plays are apparent. I propose four distinct ways in which Pasifika theatre deconstructs 'Pasifika stereotypes' such as bronze-skin beauties in grass skirts, FOBs<sup>45</sup>, and undereducated immigrants involved in crime. Firstly, Pasifika plays include background stories that facilitate identification with the character to challenge stereotypes. In *Fresh off the Boat*, Charlie's alcoholism and disillusionment are explained through his story of migration and subsequent difficulty in settling into the new society. In *The Songmaker's Chair*, the daughter's troubled life is partly a result of having to hide her pregnancy to protect the family's reputation. Secondly, in some plays, Pasifika theatre challenges stereotypes with counter-narratives. One example is the parents' migration story in *The Songmaker's Chair*. They were educated teachers in Samoa, but left in search of adventure. Their narrative counters and replaces the stereotypical story of unskilled migrants coming in search of work and a better future for their children.

In addition, plays often introduce unexpected characters, such as Joe, the middle-class gay actor in *Rantestratum*. Fourthly, the juxtaposition of the lesbian and 'more traditional' sisters in *Frangipani Perfume* highlights the diversity of Pasifika women and at the same time presents a non-conforming character to deconstruct Pasifika women's stereotypes. Yet, Unasa explained that the character of the homosexual woman from a conservative family in *Tautala* is in fact another stereotype negating the original stereotypes. Stereotypes thus exist on different levels in Pasifika plays. *Frangipani Perfume* starts with the 'sensuous image of the Three Dusky Maidens', who 'begin a dance of sleepy sensual beauty', but the scene abruptly switches to three women cleaning toilets (Urale & Fuemana, 2004p. 4). By rewriting the colonial stereotype

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<sup>45</sup>'Fresh off the Boat' refers to first generation migrants who arrived in New Zealand recently.

with the stereotype of Pasifika women, Urale dismisses the Dusky maidens and sets out to deconstruct the stereotypes of Pasifika women caught up in menial tasks.

#### **5.1.4 Challenge and entertain: the truth in style**

In the previous sections, I argued that Pasifika theatre practitioners serve Pasifika communities by empowering Pasifika people, raising their awareness of social issues, and deconstructing stereotypes. However, attention must be paid to a seemingly contradictory dynamic: practitioners feel they need to moderate the style of their plays in order to guarantee audience numbers and remain culturally appropriate.

Practitioners made it clear that direct confrontation in theatre as well as ‘preachiness’ have a negative impact on audience numbers because ‘Pls get turned off easily’ and ‘no one likes to know the truth about them’ (MAN). Some of the practitioners interviewed revealed that there is a conflict between their desire to change communities and their audience’s preference for avoiding confrontation. Direct confrontation, as one practitioner argued, ‘has a huge impact financially, artistically’ (MAN). In line with comments noted in the earlier section on constructive criticism, practitioners argue that the audience should not be challenged directly in such a way that spectators feel ridiculed or humiliated. However, direct confrontation is not regarded as problematic because of the post-colonial agenda, but rather because of its potential impact on audience numbers. There is therefore some pressure to entertain the audience, which practitioners themselves often perceive as contradictory to ‘asking questions’ and challenging the audience. It is interesting to further explore where practitioners see the role of Pasifika theatre in the light of this contradiction.

The majority of practitioners described telling the truth as the goal of theatre, although notable exceptions were Wendt and Kightley who avoided talking about such absolutes. Maiava even criticised some of his peers: ‘sometime [practitioners] get lost in the relativity, trying to keep everything almost religiously correct, and they forget about the moments and decisions that are being made in real life’ (MAI). Practitioners argued that the gap between theatre and reality undermines the social function of theatre, because theatre fails to mirror society. Most practitioners positioned themselves within a positivist epistemology, seeing Pasifika theatre as a representation of truth and themselves as tellers of truth. Narratives of truth, however, were juxtaposed with the idea that ‘no one likes to know the truth about them’ (MAN). There is an inherent contradiction between presenting the ‘truth’ and social issues, and having to moderate

the content and style of plays so that audience members are not disappointed. If we use this analysis, we must ask what practitioners do to bridge the gap between the two.

One popular idea among practitioners was that a lighter, entertaining theatre makes social issues more approachable. In *Fresh off the Boat*, 'when Oscar [Kightley's character] is getting a hiding', the physical abuse is portrayed in a comic way. Ifopo argued that portraying violence through comedy makes it approachable and memorable for actors and the audience (IFO). Such a balance between entertainment and social message was present in most Pacific Underground plays – in fact it was even referred to as a formula: plays 'made you laugh, laugh, and cry. Laugh, laugh, and cry. [Because] there is nothing like comedy or humour to open people up, and then we went: bumm' (IFO).

The dilemma of navigation between truth and style is also reflected in educational plays that were not 'educational'. During Pacific Underground's work in schools, the company wanted to channel an educational message without being overtly educational, because 'educational' was associated with 'preachy', 'boring' and 'serious' plays (MUA\_M; ANO1; IFO). Ifopo, like Manusaute, disapproved of a 'preachy' performance style: 'but we never wanted to be the preachers [and] it was for the students or teachers to decide by themselves what is wrong and what is right' (IFO). Thus, practitioners argued that it is best to mirror society and present the consequences of bullying to give space for the audience to reflect and come to a decision.

On a surface level, by leaving reflections to their audience, Pacific Underground's philosophy was similar to Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed: both presented social issues and allowed the audience to reflect on them (Boal, 1992, p. xxvi). On closer inspection, however, differences unfold. Pacific Underground's audience did not participate, so spectators perceived the complexity of social issues and came to viable solutions in a more detached way. Furthermore, in the interviews practitioners made contradictory statements about the normative messages in the play. As mentioned previously, they usually did not want to state what is wrong or right, but in other instances they explained the importance of the plays in terms of showing the 'right way', the 'truth', and that 'bullying is not cool' (MUA\_T). Therefore, contrary to practitioners' intentions the plays did have normative messages. The plays were 'educational' in that they did not follow the style of other school plays and instead presented the material in a comic fashion, rather than in the total absence of normative messages and 'lessons'.

Pasifika theatre may be light and neutral on most topics, but it approaches race in a particularly outspoken manner. Literature and interviews attribute this outspokenness to the 'outsider' position of both Pasifika theatre and Pasifika people in New Zealand (O'Donnell, 2002); CAR\_A; MAI). This argument is supported by the distinction between Pasifika people and the majority and indigenous population; Pasifika theatre is thus positioned on the margins of New Zealand's theatre scene where it has more freedom (MAN). Indeed the argument that such outspokenness is dependent on positioning in the theatre scene is further supported by the distinction between common stereotypes: serious Maori theatre in contrast to comic Pasifika theatre (KIG; CAR\_A). A more in-depth consideration of the outspokenness however reveals that it has two forms. One form, discussed in the literature, targets outside communities and engages with the discourse on ethnicity; this form is justified by the minority status of Pasifika people (KIG; RIL). There is also a different outspokenness: a form of self-deprecating humour, characteristic of the Naked Samoans' work which discusses almost stereotypical issues such as gambling, corrupt ministers, parenting and Pasifika people's socio-economic status. Such humour is aimed at Pasifika communities, and largely disregards other ethnicities and audiences.

#### **5.1.5 Formal education**

Historically, formal education and capacity building played an important role in Pasifika theatre. As these are the most obvious ways in which Pasifika theatre transforms society, the question of their present-day relevance is significant.

##### **Theatre in schools**

Theatre companies, in particular Statement Theatre and Pacific Underground, produced plays for both primary and secondary schools. The companies toured around the schools at a time when Pasifika theatre was relatively unknown, and Pasifika people were less visible in the public and political arenas. These school performances familiarised students with theatre as an art form (see Chapter 6), and it is not unreasonable to assume that due to this familiarity students were more likely to engage Pasifika theatre later in their lives. The plays presented storylines that students could engage with. For Statement Theatre, it was a process similar to Boal's forum theatre; they visited schools and asked students about their lives and finally presented stories inspired by the conversations. For Pacific Underground, the process was different in the sense



that their stories originated from their own experiences or news items, and were selected according to the stories' relevance to students.

The plays performed in schools were important because they filled a gap in the students' education. Practitioners remembered that at the time of Statement Theatre's and Pacific Underground's work in schools, the majority of productions in schools were performances of Western plays, dominated by Shakespeare and European theatre companies (LEE; MUA\_T). These plays had little connection with the lives of Pasifika students. The dis-connect was especially noticeable in the seventies, when Statement Theatre performed. The gap in existing productions inspired Statement Theatre and Pacific Underground to perform plays about social issues which were specific to the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of Pasifika students. The popularity of the productions and the invitations to perform showed that the incorporation of context-specific elements was enabling the students to engage more readily with this material than with previous non-Pasifika productions.

Most school plays took place at a time when Pasifika people were less visible in the media and theatre than they are today. Theatre practitioners such as Simeu Barton, Lees and Kightley recalled times of racism, silence and invisibility between the 1970s and 1990s (Herrick, 2007) (LEE; KIG; MAI). Consequently, role models among successful and visible Pasifika people were also rare. It was only in the mid-1990s that Pasifika people's appearances on television, in theatre, and in newspapers became more frequent. Long before the 1990s, Pasifika theatre companies were presenting role models on stage. Theatre tours increased the visibility of Pasifika people, and seeing practitioners on stage fostered the idea that the audience – the students – could become successful as well. As a student, Leilua watched *Think of a Garden* directed by Lees, and the play 'opened [her] eyes to thinking, OK so we can do it' (LEI).

The school tours also promoted the idea that the arts are a viable career path and artists can be successful – ideas which had not been widely accepted in Pasifika communities previously. For second-generation practitioners there was enormous pressure to be successful, and this is a key theme in several Pasifika plays; in *The Naked Samoans Go Home*, for instance, failure in rugby plunges a young man into suicide. Kightley also explained that parents did not consider the arts to be a valid field in which to work, and therefore questioned practitioners' choices. However, Lees pointed out that school performances influenced students' development by presenting theatre and acting as viable career options.

Many practitioners feel performing in schools is a social obligation and a way of 'paying one's dues' to the community (MUA\_T). However, there is a trend toward abandoning educational tours in order to pursue professional work instead. It is interesting to try to find out if performing in schools is only characteristic of beginner practitioners. Pacific Underground, whose members had been doing theatre and educational tours from the time before they were established as a company, regarded school performances as a training ground for themselves and for the students. As Pacific Underground developed, the company expanded the audience base from their communities and schools, and started to perform stories that were less focused on the school environment and more relevant to the practitioners themselves. Finally, the company moved away from school performances entirely. Lees, who established Statement Theatre, stopped touring around schools for his personal development as an actor. While these developments suggest that Pasifika practitioners are involved in education only at the beginning of their career, there are notable exceptions. Pacific Underground still performs for children: *Angels* debuted in Aranui High School and *Matariki* was performed for children in Maraes. Additionally, practitioners such as Kightley still visit schools to see their plays performed. Yet while practitioners still participate in education, they are not systematically involved. Some associated performing in schools with amateur theatre or with a training ground, despite the fact that professional theatres like Auckland Theatre Company and Court Theatre are still involved in education. In addition, most practitioners did not mention formal education as part of their agenda.

What are the possible consequences of non-involvement in education? Providing role models and engendering pride in Pasifika cultures through education is one of the most evident ways Pasifika theatre has changed society, thus practitioners' social engagement diminished as they stopped performing in schools. The early 'theatre and education' tours<sup>46</sup> were important for their timing as well, because practitioners visited schools before Pasifika theatre companies became successful. They therefore conveyed a positive outlook and pride in Pasifika identity in an existing void. Although Pasifika theatre makers are more visible today, the scarcity of these tours means that students do not realise that theatre work is a realistic possibility; even those

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<sup>46</sup>Theatre and education' tours were an initiative at the beginning of the '90s, Pacific Underground members often remembered.

who consider acting as a career 'just want to be on *Shortland Street*' (LEE). Performing in schools was rewarding due to its potential for community building. Even though Pasifika people are more visible in other media than they were twenty years ago, the decline in school performances means that current students have significantly fewer opportunities to engage with Pasifika theatre in schools than students in the 1990s, therefore they do not benefit from theatre and education, and this could reduce the popularity of theatre as well as the practitioners' visibility.

### **Capacity building**

Teaching, training and educating other theatre practitioners is another form of education, and such capacity building is becoming more prominent in Pasifika theatre. In recent years, there have been a growing number of initiatives geared toward emerging Pasifika theatre practitioners. Banana Boat, an initiative that helps young Pasifika writers, became independent from Playmarket in 2011. Aumua, Riley and Maiava took part in the initiative as participants, and explain that the project helped them. Independently of the Banana Boat initiative, Kila Kokonut Krew started the Young Kila Playwrights project. It selected young writers from the community and helped them to produce their plays. However, unlike Banana Boat in its original set-up, the Young Kila Playwrights project focused on the production rather than the writing stage, and trained the writers for the company.

Less formal initiatives include capacity building through opportunities for newcomers. Practitioners such as Mavaega and Kightley pointed out that the more diverse their experiences are, the more easily they can survive in the tough job market. Television work is a frequent example, offering the opportunity to acquire a diversity of skills and experiences. In addition, it provides some financial stability. Capacity building is also considered important in terms of tours and the Pasifika Festival in Auckland. Such events provide opportunities for practitioners to acquire a range of artistic and production skills, and more importantly, the events target one of the main areas of development: management. Practitioners I interviewed articulated that there are not enough trained and experienced Pasifika managers and producers (CHA; MUA\_T; CAM). Therefore, in addition to gaining experience during large-scale events like the Pasifika Festival, practitioners therefore advocate that there should be more training events, such as ArtSpeak (2010) and Playwrights Festival, to support their development.

## 5.2 How do communities influence theatre practitioners?

Theatre is not created in a bubble; theatre makers and the institution of theatre are influenced by numerous factors that range from audience to theatre makers' communities. Because theatre making is so interconnected, the question arises: how do Pasifika theatre practitioners perceive the influence of communities on their work?

### 5.2.1 Social control and reputation

Ancestors (parents and elders, as well as symbolic ancestors) figure as cornerstones of Pacific identities (Spickard et al., 2002, p. 47). For instance, as discussed in my chapter on methodology, respect features prominently within Pasifika methodologies. Does it follow, then, that theatre makers allow these concepts to guide their work? Respect toward known ancestors (parents, elders) may be seen in their being given the opportunity to exercise control over productions. The issue of giving respect to elders is especially visible in the production of *Angels*, which contains adaptations of religious hymns. Mavaega, the musical director, in turn describes hymns as the property of the church. As a result, practitioners were initially hesitant to use hymns. Since I wish to explore the reason behind this hesitation, let us examine the issue from different angles.

The first step in understanding the hesitation may be to realise how important the church is in Pasifika people's lives. Pacific people were converted to the Christian faith during colonization, and the majority, both in the Pacific Islands and overseas, still adhere to the Christian faith today (Bellwood, Fox, & Tryon, 1995). According to the 2006 Census, 80.2% of Pasifika people living in New Zealand perceive themselves as Christians (2006b). Other studies showed that the church acted as a safety net for recent migrants (Wurtzburg, 2003). Accordingly, in the interviews practitioners considered the influence of the church important. They vividly recalled church attendance, donations, Sunday School, White Sunday, and stories about ministers. Practitioners also learned Christian values, ideas, and ideology.

In the light of the church's importance, and the initial hesitation to use hymns, a special performance of *Angels* was planned, prior to the official opening, with the express purpose of seeking approval from the community's church leaders and elders. In the Canterbury Museum, Pacific Underground prepared a performance for the elders only.

All the ministers knew my parents, they were sitting there and I was playing the hymn with jazz chord and a bit of Jimi Hendrix in there, and I look up all had their eyes closed, and I looked up 'oh no '. But in the end they all [Mavaega claps], and said good on you, and we went ahead with the show. (MAV)

As it turned out, the show was granted permission easily, even with the hymns set to jazz. Yet having received permission, the musician felt the need to further explain why consent was sought, by citing legality, universal truths, and religion. Mavaega argued that '[he had] to get the respect and permission just like you would with copying anyone else's thing.' He argued that the reason was that 'those songs belong to the church. Can I cut the song up? So I got the permission which is the right thing to do' (MAV). Likening the ownership of hymns to copyright suggests this was more than a symbolic gesture. The metaphor of copyright makes hymns the property of the church, and the elders and ministers are made the stakeholders. While Pacific Underground members felt that the songs belonged to the church and elders, and that permission was needed in order to modify and incorporate the music in the show, legally the 'church', 'the ministers', and the 'elders' did not have the rights to the hymns, because hymns were traditionally written by any member of the church. Thus, practitioners may have referred to right and wrong as moral rather than legal obligations to justify whether they use hymns at all. Such justification highlights the idea of a powerful church, which 'coming from a Polynesian background is quite sacred, anything from the church belongs to the church' (MAV). Thus it can be seen that Pasifika cultures are strongly influenced by the church, and a request for approval is an acknowledgment of the church and elders as a cultural and social authority. This acknowledgement also means that they are given control.

What kind of control do the elders exert? The elders might have endorsed the play to their followers, but they might equally have revoked their support. Their influence on marketing and publicity in their communities was measurable in attendance and revenues. Apart from this influence on publicity, the elders have no weight in the traditional sense, as they do not own copyright. Thus, in terms of practicalities and implications for the production, as argued above, the outcome power of church leaders is limited. However, they were given the opportunity to suggest changes, and their power in this sense was unquantifiable in terms of revenue. Thus, more importantly, the performance for the ministers and elders also had a symbolic component; it acknowledged them and asked for their support, and affirmed their power, which lay in tradition. Power, which is unquantifiable, is important, as it resides in the social structure and in the individual's beliefs. Power can be exerted through values, norms and ideologies, and often

cannot be measured. Ideas and values underpin social actions according to Bourdieu's and Lukes's arguments (Gledhill, 2000, p. 144; Lukes, 2004). Therefore, it can be seen that traditions and everyday life are connected to religion like a net, which includes practitioners, community members and elders. It was power embedded in the social structure that prompted Mavaega to ask the elders for their approval.

Beyond respecting elders, Pasifika theatre practitioners are also motivated to preserve their reputation in their communities, and this intention affects practitioners' work. The importance of reputation in Pasifika communities is illustrated in Albert Wendt's play, *The Songmaker's Chair*: Lulu's pregnancy is kept secret, even from her father, to avoid damaging the family's reputation. She gives the baby up for adoption, but her conscience troubles her and she becomes an addict, spending time in jail. Her burden is only lifted when her story is told to her father. Given the importance of reputation, I argue that some practitioners are selective in their roles and writing in order to avoid damaging their status within their communities. Actors accept roles on the basis of potential approval by the community, and nudity is a frequent source of conflict. A Samoan elder and his two grown-up daughters went to the theatre and disapproved of a nude scene (Anonymous 9, 2009). An actress explained that nude roles are too risqué, because the community would disapprove, and the role might damage her social standing as well as that of her family (ANO1).

An extreme argument shows that practitioners may be excluded from the community. Crossing of taboos can lead to total exclusion of the practitioner and her family from her community, as Heka indicated when she asked 'how do you go on, when they have blocked your family, your community?' (HEK). While she declined to name any particular instances and preferred to talk about the issue theoretically, she did point out that practitioners 'need courage to take a critical look' and need to modify their work unless they are prepared to take the consequences (HEK). A significant assumption emerges from these examples with regard to the social consequences of art. Even though practitioners want to raise pressing social issues, crossing boundaries can have detrimental effects on their reputation. In the light of social changes, social exclusion may be somewhat surprising because it indicates the prevailing importance and strength of Pasifika communities rather than their end due to assimilation.

### 5.2.2 Sources and inspiration

Practitioners' narratives reveal various ways in which they claim the right to represent Pasifika communities. Representation is sometimes problematic because the practitioners are unacknowledged as an authority by the audience. For instance, the reliability and trustworthiness of Pacific Underground performers was questioned after performing *Fresh off the Boat* in Samoa. The audience's voice is described by Mavaega:

Why come here to tell our people, that that is what we are like? You know, some of the Islanders who never been to New Zealand, have images in their head 'that's what New Zealand is like' and then we come, put this play on and show that the character is a drunk. (MAV)

*Fresh off the Boat* was a story of first-generation migrants from Samoa, and the audience felt attacked because the images presented in the play contradicted their expectations about life in New Zealand. It may also be that the audience identified with Charles, the fresh migrant who had only just left Samoa and may have been like them in many ways. Mavaega explained that negative reactions arose because the audience thought it was a real story. This statement, however, disregards the fact that people in Samoa are familiar with the genre of Western theatre, this is further discussed in the following chapter. Thus, it may be that the audience questioned second-generation practitioners' authority to describe migration. Part of the problem could have been questioning the play's authenticity.

Theatre makers' authenticity is linked to their sources, and it might be questioned by the audience. It is political, the same way as, for instance, research is political. Stating the position of the researcher is not a statement for clarity only, it is a necessary element to locate the researcher's world-view, background and positioning in the field. Authenticity has been questioned in twentieth century social sciences on the levels of culture, traditions, and communities. Wendt, in *Toward a New Oceania*, argued against the myth of traditional and unchanging cultures, against absolute truth, and authenticity in the Pacific:

Like a tree a culture is forever growing new branches, foliage and roots. Our cultures, contrary to the simplistic interpretations of our romantics, were changing even in pre-Papalagi times through inter-island contact, and the endeavours of exceptional individuals and groups who manipulated politics, religion and other people (Wendt, 1976p.12)

Wendt not only questions the notion of fixed identities but also problematises authenticity.

The most direct claims for authenticity are lived experiences, in these cases theatre is often used as therapy. Personal accounts are often incorporated into plays, but their presence is strongest in solos, which are especially popular in drama school productions, such as Polataiavo's and Leota's productions, and in Pasifika theatre by women, such as Nawalowalo's and Fuemana's plays. Polataiavo explained that her solo, which is a story of a Japanese geisha, in fact comments on her relation to Samoan culture:

My solo [...] was about being bound, bound by tradition and wanting to break free, [...] about always questioning Samoan life and culture, and some rules, why it is the way it is, but coming to that conclusion, that is just the way it is (POL)

As Polataiavo's reflection shows, she used the play to engage with her own culture and then come to terms with it. Thus, the making of the play was therapeutic.

The main reason the first Pasifika theatre companies started, according to all interviewed practitioners, is that they 'wanted to tell [their] own stories' (Kightley, Muagututi'a, and members of Kila Kokonut Krew). To create more roles was also a strong motivation, and 'Pacific Underground came about as [practitioners] wanted to tell [their] own stories, have Pacific roles' (MUA\_T).

I argue that theatre makers identify various groups in society as silent, and consider it their responsibility to speak up for these people. Manusaute described Pasifika people as powerless:

My voice speaks about my people, my people struggle, my people in society has been treating my people and that kind of stuff, the relation of my people.[...] That's my voice, that's what I fight for. [...] It is just the desperation to be heard, without my company they cannot be heard. It is important to be heard, because I have something to say. (MAN)

Without Kila Kokonut Krew, the voice of desperation and struggle of Pasifika people cannot be heard, argued Manusaute, who identified his company as a lone soldier in the fight for Pasifika people. It is interesting to consider this positioning for it reveals a strong social criticism: Pasifika people are not only regarded disadvantaged but also silent.

There is a sense of being cheated in the way he describes migration: 'we come looking for the land of milk and honey, and ended up living in south Auckland: low income, state housing, schools, fucked up' (MAN). The disillusionment with the 'milk and honey' dream is identified as the driving force behind Pasifika theatre. A claim for authenticity of representation can be found in the lack of representation by other parties: 'it is beyond talk, speaking what everybody else



should have spoken' (MAN). Such a statement echoes earlier discussions on the silence and ineffectiveness of church, media, and other institutions. Manusaute then nominated himself as the voice of the crowd, disregarding his elite position in the community as a theatre maker and artist.

Others considered silent by the theatre makers include children, women, the abused, and the colonised, living on the margins of society. Avia defines these people as silent, with neither language nor opportunity to represent themselves and be heard in society:

I am brutal in the defence of the innocent and the powerless, I feel like that about my work, can be brutal and dark. But it is written that way for a purpose in defence of those who don't have the voice to speak for themselves. (AVI)

Avia represents those groups who are labelled as innocent and powerless due to mistreatment. This sense of powerlessness is similar to Pasifika people's powerlessness due to the lack of socio-economic change as described by Manusaute.

These theatre makers do not question whether they have the right to represent the people they identify as powerless. In the light of the dilemma of representation, which is essentially problematic in contemporary social scientific discourse, Avia affirms that she has the right to do so, and claims authenticity. A claim to authenticity is based on the idea of shared social, economic, and political problems. Avia remained general about those she can represent, and explained that her internal world is connected to the social world, and therefore the issues 'are as much part of [her] internal landscape as part of the social landscape, which is why [she] speak[s] with some authority on the matter' (AVI). Therefore, authenticity is linked to humanity as a collective. For representing Pasifika people, Manusaute relies on a strong shared identity. The basis for representation is the essentialised collective identity, and both real and symbolic shared experiences (including shared social spaces and socio-economic situation). For Manusaute this identity is shared by Pasifika people in general, and representation is inseparable from ethnicity.

The experiences of mixed-ethnicity practitioners further problematised the issue of ethnicity and representation. The contrast between Ifopo's memories and young multi-ethnic actors' experiences is a proof of politicization of ethnicity. At the start of the 1990s it was unquestioned when a European actress was painted brown and played a Pasifika role. However, in the 2000s mixed ethnicity actors, who described themselves as 'not brown enough', did not get cast for

Pasifika roles (LEO). Riley recalled that he received criticism in *His Mother's Son*, because the reviewer thought he was European rather than Samoan, and so he criticised the director for her lack of respect toward Pasifika people. Mixed-ethnicity Pasifika theatre practitioners thus pointed out that 'ethnic origin' or language counted less than looks. The boundary for group construction was skin colour and other secondary ethnic characteristics, such as build and facial features. This realization is in contrast with developments regarding Maori, where ancestry was politicised and became the primary boundary between being Maori and non-Maori (Rata, 2010).

Non-Pasifika playwrights writing on Pasifika themes could also be questioned. Although most Pasifika plays are written by theatre makers from Pasifika backgrounds, Armstrong, a European playwright, wrote several plays related to Pasifika people. Whereas he was not openly criticised in the interviews, one practitioner felt it necessary to explain why it is acceptable that he wrote a Pasifika play as 'he came up with it', even though 'he is as white as it gets' (CHA). Chandra emphasises the value of the 'idea' and authorship and criticises those who argue against Armstrong on the basis of his ethnicity. Artistic quality was another authenticating factor, as 'he did a good job' (CHA). The need to explain and then further comment on a non-Pasifika writer's merit in writing about Pasifika indicates the importance of ethnicity as a recognised source of representation.

The problematisation of ethnicity sometimes takes place in ethnicity-specific terms as well. The writers of *Angels* argue that they asked for Samoan women, yet the cast was of mixed ethnicities, namely Tongan, Maori, and Samoan women. Nawalowalo strongly objected to negative views about multi-ethnic casts. In her play *Vula*, inspired by Fiji, she cast women from different ethnicities, and regarded them as enriching the play. Thus she considered ethnicity an advantage rather than a problem. Interestingly, while the ethnic divide was often mentioned among Pasifika and non-Pasifika, apart from these two examples there were no references to differences between Pasifika ethnicities.

While the above examples identified ethnicity as the shared experience, a recent development in the history of Pasifika aims to discuss these issues from a gender-specific perspective. A growing number of Pasifika plays, such as *On a Different Shelf*, *Mapaki*, *Frangipani Perfume*, *Angels*, and *Vula*, explore the experience of Pasifika women in New Zealand:

There are some women's perspectives that can't be told through male voices or collectives. As a woman you have all these layers and relationships and we're really good at identifying and verbalising and it's always males and it is a good opportunity for us, there are these four women, different relationships, all those sort of things only women can say. (MUA\_T)

Gender-specific perspectives emphasise that women's and men's experiences are radically different, and therefore there is a need for more plays by female writers. Both ethnicity as a basis of Pasifika theatre and gender as a basis for Pasifika women's work are emphasised as major distinguishing factors that are based on experiences that only an insider can tell.

The spiritual domain is another source of authenticity. A participant recalled that the ancestors spoke through her, and her writing became a channel for their voices. In one performance, she represented an individual with whom she did not have a temporal or spatial connection. She found authenticity in the spirit world, in the character's (re)presentation. As she explained it, the spirit world connected her to the subject through her unknown ancestors.

When I wrote it, I didn't really know what the hell I am doing, and it is a very complicated poetic form and I wrote it almost perfect, barely changed it. [...] That's one of the strongest experiences I have had, something arrived kind of fully formed. [...] As a performance, it is very strong, I do feel that spirit coming through me and it is a very strong energy.' (AVI)

The connection is linked to the concept of 'Va', a liminal place described by Smith (Smith, 2010; Wright, 2011). 'Va', as discussed in Chapter 2, is a meeting point and a place of ritual, the in-between space between in-between situations (Smith, 2010). Avia explained that she considers herself a translator, a channel to the audience from the ancestors. Therefore, references to ancestors as sources not only had an authenticating function but they were also rituals that connected the past and present audience.

### **Research and rediscovering histories**

To this date research, especially into pre-colonial and colonial histories, has not been a major characteristic of Pasifika theatre. In postcolonial theatre, importance is often placed on rediscovering the past and history, but among Pasifika practitioners only Wendt incorporated pre-colonisation motifs, albeit there are claims for the use of traditional art forms, and there is a recent trend and plans for pre-migration histories from artists such as Lees, Tanya Muagututi'a, Greenwood, and Nawalowalo.

Albert Wendt used historical research in his play, *The Songmaker's Chair*: historical references, symbols, and facts appeared throughout the play. Wendt remembered that during rehearsals for *The Songmaker's Chair* (Wendt), he told the cast and production team about the history of Samoan religion. He took on the roles of the playwright, educator, and community builder at the same time.

They wanted me to participate to tell the actors about the history and ancient religion of Samoa, the music, the history of Samoa which they didn't know. They were thankful for that, through acting in the play they learned about the history, and because they are Samoans themselves. (WEN)

Wendt provided the others with knowledge about history that has faded, and connections to the play and to their roots. The gap between the actors' knowledge and the information in the play highlighted the gaps in the education system; and several participants felt they did not have the chance to learn about their culture in New Zealand's education system.

*The Songmaker's Chair*, like other writings by Wendt, shows an interest in looking at history before the colonization of the Pacific Islands, and its effects on people today. The post-colonial enquiry into the 'lost' and 'forgotten' history of Samoa begins before the colonisers arrived on the island and extends to the lives of second- and third-generation Samoan immigrants to New Zealand. Through this exploration, Wendt attempted to reconstruct lost traditions and raise awareness.

One of my major interests has always been an exploration of the ancient past of Samoa, which was condemned by the colonisers. In many countries that have been colonised you will find that it is one of the basic issues: what has been done to the indigenous people, in this period of time, what has been done to the ancient religion, beliefs, politics, ways, and life. (WEN)

Theatre making involved familiarising the audience with these 'ancient religion, beliefs, politics', and histories. Wendt did not see these histories as extinct. Indeed he pointed out that these histories and cultures are not dead: 'unless you wipe everybody out, everybody dies, cultures survive in very strange ways, no matter how colonised the people are' (WEN). He thus positioned his writing, theatre making and guiding actors as a process of awakening, where the colonised people attempt to recover and rediscover what was once theirs. The reclaiming of history, traditions and culture is central in Wendt's work. As he argued, 'some of it will emerge eventually, especially when the colonised people decide they had enough and they react' (WEN).

An interesting contradiction is that while plays rarely incorporate Pasifika myth and pre-colonial history, *Matariki*, a play by Pacific Underground (2010), was based on Maori myths, as this note from my journal describes:

[The children seem] amazed that the play will tell them everything about Matariki. [...] Matariki is the Maori New Years, and it is connected to a constellation of stars. [...] the main characters (Samoan and Maori) discovered their history by travelling through Maori and New Zealand history jumping time zones, with the help of a Samoan Godmother (Journal entry, 2010 June 15, Marae at Pages Road)

The observation reveals that while there were Samoan characters in the play, it focused on the history of New Zealand and was primarily based on changes in knowledge about Maori customs. The legend and different understandings were described in detail, and contemporary reflections by children were added. It is an interesting dilemma, that Maori legends are presented in detail while Pasifika legends are largely absent from Pasifika theatre. One reason may be the availability of material, but perhaps it is because the majority of Pasifika theatre focuses primarily on Pasifika history, migration, and its aftermath.

Other Pasifika histories include *Think of a Garden*, *Lena* and *Dawn Raids*, but they are mainly concerned with 20<sup>th</sup> century Pasifika history and symbolism. The observation that pre-colonial traditions are not incorporated in the research is unexplained by practitioners. While it could be caused by a lack of available information, as in the actors' case in Wendt's play, there may also be a lack of interest. Whether the lack of research and incorporation of pre-migration materials will lead to further fading of Pacific cultures or to an upsurge of such topics in Pasifika theatre, is however too early to tell.

### **5.3 Problem topics**

Four main themes came up repeatedly in the interviews and Pasifika plays: ethnic conflict and racism, migration and its aftermath, domestic violence, and bullying. These topics and the emphasis placed on them are indicative of practitioners' main concerns.

#### **5.3.1 Ethnic conflict and racism: inter-ethnic dating**

Tusi, you are a coconut. He's a kumara. Do you know what I am talking about?

It does not matter what you are. Look, Mum, Shakespeare once said a rose is a rose, and by any other name it would smell just as sweet

(Kightley et al., 2000, p. 44)

While Tusi, the Samoan girl, tries to convince her mother that she should be allowed to date a Maori boy, arguing that ethnicity does not matter, the mother does not change her mind. Ethnic conflict and racism often have a central role in Pasifika plays (for example *The Songmaker's Chair*, *Romeo and Tusi*, *Once were Samoan*, and *Rantenstratum*). Ethnic conflict is often related to inter-ethnic relationships.

Relationships between different Pasifika ethnicities and different ethnic groups, including other Pasifika ethnicities, have been prominent since the 1950s, and they are mentioned in plays as well. In Albert Wendt's play, *The Songmaker's Chair*, one of the children is married to a Maori. This, according to Wendt, is widely accepted and quite common: 'which is not something I made up; this is how many families in Auckland are like. Especially the marriage between Maori, and PI, Samoans, is very high, well it was very high up to the 1980s' (WEN). Statistics from the 2006 Census show that younger Pasifika people are more likely to have more ethnicities than the older generations. While 47% of children aged 0-4 years had more than one ethnicity, 93% of Pasifika people identify with one Pacific ethnicity only (2006a). Whereas the change could show a shift in people's attitudes toward having multiple ethnicities, it is an indicator of increasing inter-ethnic relationships and children born from these relationships as well. Other sources point out that inter-ethnic relationships and marriages add to New Zealand's diversity, and that they are frequent (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996; Hill, 2010).

Inter-ethnic dating appears in several productions of Pacific Underground, for instance *Romeo and Tusi*. Tanya Muagututi'a explained that the company was motivated to incorporate the topic in their plays, because it is still a sensitive issue. According to her, it is a challenge for Pasifika youth to communicate with their parents and gain acceptance, 'because lots of young people came with their parents, who didn't know how to say I really like that girl or guy' (MUA\_T). The feedback on the play, explained Ifopo, was positive. Both Pasifika and non-Pasifika audience members said that it helped them confront their feelings. Ifopo added that the theme is not restricted to Pasifika communities: 'at the same time we had lots of other ethnic groups coming, I've never seen more Asian or Indian [people in the audience]. We realised these were universal stories' (IFO). Inter-ethnic dating is described as not specific to Pasifika communities but problematic across ethnicities.

Dating alone is problematic, and dating an outsider intensifies the situation. *Romeo and Tusi* is centred on a Maori-Pasifika love story. It is loosely based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, a

story of two teenagers from different backgrounds who are in love without parental approval. *Romeo and Tusi* was originally developed for local high schools and only later performed for a wider audience. It has the structure of a play within a play, and as the students rehearse Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the love story of Anaru (a Maori boy) and Tusi (a Samoan girl) unfolds. Their parents disapprove of the relationship, and the two mothers go to great lengths to express their disapproval: they even report each other to the police and welfare authorities. Although the play is a comedy, it reveals the ethnic conflicts and boundaries that reside even among neighbours living in 'Sorry Street', somewhere in New Zealand. Kila Kokonut Krew describes a similar problem in *Once were Samoans*, where one of the daughters is dating a Maori neighbour.

Plays also portrayed Pasifika-European relationships. In Toa Fraser's *No 2*, Tyler (a Fijian-New Zealander) takes her girlfriend Maria (from an English background) home to a family celebration. The matriarch and most of the family accept Maria, but tensions with Tyler's aunt remain. *Horizons*, a play by Pacific Underground members, written by Simon Small and directed by Robert Gilbert, also explored inter-ethnic relationships. *Horizons* is set in contemporary New Zealand, with one of the storylines focusing on the daughter's choice of a Pakeha boy, and the parents' reaction. Ifopo explained that there was a strong expectation of having romantic relationships with someone from one's own ethnic group or, following a more liberal understanding, someone of another Pasifika ethnicity. She started to explain the family's reaction: 'she goes out with European guy, not an Island person and family was like...', but she did not finish the sentence and seemed uncertain whether to even continue (IFO).

The majority of inter-ethnic relationships portrayed in Pasifika theatre involved Maori and Pasifika, with fewer examples of European and Pasifika couples. The two factors most significant to ethnic conflict, according to previous research, were social distance and prejudice (Allport, 1979; Bogardus, 1928). Conflicts with Europeans are less frequent in the plays, and this can be explained by the larger social distance between the European and Pasifika populations. As social distance decreases, the groups share more characteristics such as geography, socio-economic conditions and ethnicity. There is also a greater degree of familiarity and interaction. Literature shows that intergroup-interaction and competition, living in the same neighbourhood, and social and economic change influenced inter-ethnic relationships. In addition the same research

found that intermarriage was opposed to in other developed countries, such as the United States or the Netherlands (Moran, 2001; Tolsma, Lubbers, & Coenders, 2008).

Competition between ethnic groups is another element that could influence perceptions of intermarriages. Ethnic competition theory proposes that the perception of competition between ethnic groups, whether on an individual or a group level, intensifies negative attitudes toward groups that are perceived as not one's own (Coser, 1998). Individuals in similar socio-economic positions are more likely to have similar experiences and attitudes, and to see themselves as competing for the same resources. This becomes more prevalent when immigration increases (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). Such competition is present on both the individual and the community level as groups and individuals strive to acquire power and resources for cultural and collective identity (Blalock, 1967; Tajfel, 1982). Cultural competition is also found to be a crucial element that can influence attitudes toward intermarriages (M. C. Taylor, 1998). Recent studies show that neighbourhoods are competitive locations, and as a result within these areas negative attitudes toward intermarriages can develop (Lubbers, Scheepers, & Billiet, 2000; Oliver & Mendelberg, 2000; Quillian, 1995; Semyonov, Raijman, & Gorodzeisky, 2006; M. C. Taylor, 1998; Tolsma et al., 2008).

There is more interaction and competition between Maori and Pasifika people, and this may explain why most of the plays describe such relationships. Maori and Pasifika often live in the same neighbourhood, work in similar positions and send their children to the same school. In a comic cartoon, *Bro Town* by the Naked Samoans, when a Maori family moves into a Pasifika-dominated street in the working-class neighbourhood of Morningside, one of the neighbours expresses strong criticism. Morningside is a generalised neighbourhood with inhabitants of lower socio-economic status and lower education compared to the national average. It is composed mainly of Pasifika people who migrated to New Zealand, and could be seen as an example of a place where ethnic intermarriage is problematic. This environment is very similar to the one depicted in *Romeo and Tusi* or *Once were Samoans*. Therefore, there is more interaction and competition, which can explain why jokes and conflicts, like dating outside of one's community, are more frequently about Maori than about Europeans in Pasifika theatre.

At the same time, while Maori and Pasifika communities often have similar socio-economic situations and educational backgrounds, stereotypes prevail. To the minister's question in *Romeo and Tusi*, the Maori and the Pasifika mother reply in unison.



Minister        Why are you so prejudiced against each other?

Mrs Heke and Mrs Aiu That's because they smell. They have big families, and they eat too much.

(Kightley et al., 2000, p. 63)

The stereotypes may be depicted in a comic fashion, but their presence persists in Pasifika theatre. *Ranterstantrum* by Victor Rodger explores the construction and persistence of Pasifika stereotypes and adds a new dimension, as the tension is between Europeans and Pasifika rather than Maori in Pasifika in other plays.

### **5.3.2 After migration: career choices and intergenerational conflict**

A recurring theme in plays is Pasifika migration and the consequent divides in Pasifika people's lives, history and culture. The saying 'promised land of milk and honey, but the milk has gone off' appeared in both plays and interviews (MAN; IFO). Practitioners in interviews expressed concern with the lack of change in Pasifika migrants' socio-economic circumstances, which are still below the national average (KIG; MAI; MAN; IFO).

The social and economic backdrop for migration stories has been explored in Pasifika theatre since the beginning. Some of the plays highlighted the Pacific Islands' political and economic situation. In *Once were Samoans*, the Fijian coup influenced Pasifika people's lives. The decline in New Zealand's economy followed by increased ethnic tension was portrayed in *Dawn Raids*. The plays explore Pasifika people's social status in New Zealand, the stories ranging from work in factories and dreaming of a better future (e.g. *Factory*), to overstayers' pursuit in *Dawn Raids*, and to growing up and living in New Zealand (*Niu Sila, Romeo and Tusi*). More recent plays like *Music and Me* portray events removed from migration but still explore its socio-economic consequences.

Intergenerational conflict is a recurring theme in Pasifika plays, often portrayed through career choices. Parents are frequently depicted as first-generation migrants, and children as born and brought up in New Zealand. Practitioners explained that for second-generation migrants, the link to Pacific cultures is through their parents, community, and the church.

An important migrant aspiration is to get a good education for their children so they will find better jobs. As discussed in the theoretical framework, Pasifika migration began in the '50s and intensified by the '70s, and was augmented by the demand for unskilled labour and supportive

migration policies to New Zealand. First-generation migrants often worked in low-paying jobs, and there was an expectation that their children would do well and opt for occupations associated with success.

First-generation migrants saw opportunities for their children, and thought that if the children would attend educational institutions in New Zealand and follow the parents' work ethic, they would rise on the social ladder. Manusaute from Kila Kokonut Krew described it as part of the 'honey and milk dream' and Kightley added: 'that was a dream of our parents, like every migrant, that our parents moved and wanted opportunity for their children to be lawyers and doctors. It was hard for our parents sometimes' (KIG). The expectations, pressures, and resulting conflicts were incorporated in numerous Pasifika productions. *Horizons* (1992), by Pacific Underground, discussed career choices, for instance 'the daughter not wanting to go to mainstream, be a doctor or nurse, but wants to go to the arts' (IFO). In *Jingle Bells*, the Polynesian mother preferred her daughter to abandon the quest for fame in the arts, and go to university or work in a factory.

Art was not seen as a viable career because of the perception that it does not pay enough, explained Kightley. Occupations such as medicine or law were the preferred career choices of parents, emphasised theatre makers. Muagututi'a said that the expectation to perform, to do your best was 'part of our upbringing. There is a huge pressure to be brilliant' (MUA\_T). Participants mentioned the pressure repeatedly, and Kightley pointed out that it was part of the 'immigrant dream'. He had this to say about first-generation Pasifika immigrants: 'they were young people with dreams and hopes, but they put those on hold for their children. They thought: "oh well, maybe we can't have our dreams, but maybe our children can live our dreams"' (KIG). Only Muagututi'a pointed out that some parents were more interested in the general idea of their children doing their best and were supportive. She said her father saw all the shows 'just for support, even when we told him they were bad', and encouraged them to aim for perfection (MUA\_T).

Pasifika theatre practitioners' success and visibility eventually helped to foster acceptance of theatre making as an occupation, Kightley said:

You could actually get paid for it, it is not just a fun thing to do, and if that was your passion, to tell stories. And perform, that was to show young PIs pathways, and look it's possible you don't have to just get a job, you can do something artistic. (KIG)

Success was seen as proof that art can be financially beneficial. In addition, television appearances were a major factor contributing to a shift in parents' and communities' views on art as an occupation.

### **5.3.3 Domestic violence**

Domestic violence is a significant issue, mentioned by numerous participants and explored in plays as well. The populations most affected by domestic violence in New Zealand are Maori and Pasifika (Ministry of Justice, 1998). The Ministry of Social Development published a report outlining the severity of the issue that includes intimate partner violence, violence against children and other forms of domestic violence (Lievore & Mayhew, 2007 188).

Pasifika plays often portray domestic violence and practitioners identify it as a serious and damaging issue. *Mapaki* (1999) explores domestic violence: Fisi, the main character, is beaten up by her partner. Violence is juxtaposed with her childhood memories in the play. Leilani Unasa's play, *On a Different Shelf*, tells three Pacific women's stories. Unasa described them as vaguely based on stereotypes; one of them is the figure of a woman with a history of being abused. In one of the monologues in Avia's *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt* (a series of 17 monologues by different characters), a young girl recites the Samoan alphabet, but she is actually telling the story of being abused. Avia identified domestic violence as an important issue that affects Pasifika communities and claimed that the victims are innocent and powerless. One goal of her performance poetry was to empower these victims.

While practitioners mentioned domestic violence as an important issue, they did not elaborate on the topic or on how it is incorporated in their work in detail, unlike often stated, less sensitive issues.

### **5.3.4 Bullying**

Studies show that New Zealand has a traditional bullying culture (Marsh, Williams, Nada-Raja, & McGee, 2010), and the topic appeared in Pasifika plays as well. During their theatre and education tours when Pacific Underground toured the country with plays relevant to children, they had more than three plays on bullying, inspired by the increasing media coverage in the 1990s. In addition, Ifopo was asked by a schoolteacher to write a play that could be performed in schools. For their play, *Bully For You* (1997), Pacific Underground members built on their personal experiences, and visited schools to gather information. Bullying was not only

prominent in primary but in secondary schools as well, and these plays were often performed across ages, with some adaptation: 'one play for primary, and change it for high school. Change into their lingo, you know how they change their lingo, make it relate to them so they can understand the story' (ANO1).

Pacific Underground members claimed that they took an approach to bullying that is not gender-specific. Ifopo explained, 'we researched around schools and a lot of them were girl bullies' (IFO). They then produced a play about groups of bullies, like the Cat girls, who hurt other children purposefully. Their third play on bullying featured heavily in the media in 1999. It was for a primary school audience, and again, it tackled gender stereotypes. It was about a girl who bullied a boy, 'because girls are usually not seen as bullies' (IFO). As the majority of Pacific Underground's plays about bullies were about girl bullies, they shifted the stereotyped gender but remained gender-specific.

The plays also provided background stories. In one play, a girl's bullying behaviour was triggered by the birth of a sibling and the consequent lack of parental attention. Exploring her circumstances, the play took bullying out of the school environment and connected school and home, thus facilitating a more in-depth exploration of the issues and examining both schooling and parenting. Although some comic potential underlay the situation (she 'did all sorts of stupid stuff, trying to get her friend to do it with her,' explained Tanya Muagututi'a), at the end of the story there was 'a message about that it's not acceptable - that behaviour, whether you are a boy or a girl' (MUA\_T).

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

At the beginning of this chapter, referring to the debate on the purpose of theatre, I asked the question: whom does Pasifika theatre serve and on whose behalf should it practice? In other words: do Pasifika theatre practitioners want to hold a mirror to society, or do they wish to use their theatre as a hammer to shape society?

On the one hand, many practitioners thought the purpose of theatre was social change and they felt responsible to 'serve' their communities; in other words, they wished to use theatre as a weapon. On the other hand, they wished to present the truth, and make it possible for their audiences to identify with the situations and characters.

Practitioners also wanted to show social issues on stage. Pasifika theatre presents stories of ethnic conflict, domestic violence, and bullying. Practitioners emphasised that they believe the purpose of theatre is to make social issues visible, to show a mirror to society. Paradoxical as it may seem, they want to change society by representing it, to use the mirror as a hammer. Practitioners argued that in this way, the audience is entertained and engaged, yet social change is brought forward by showing what is happening in their communities. Consequently, the answer to the question lies in the combination of representation and social change. Practitioners see their hammer as made of mirror, an image that would not satisfy either side of the debate. While those aiming for social representation would identify with the discourse of practitioners, those promoting testimony would consider the practice closer to their ideas.

The research also reveals that it is not only theatre that changes society, but society also changes theatre. As discussed above, what happens in society is reflected in theatre because practitioners hold a mirror. Theatre however is dependent on social conventions and hierarchies, so practitioners feel they must tailor their work to gain acceptance from leaders in the community, and preserve their social status.

## Chapter 6: Influences and positioning of Pasifika theatre

In the beginning of the thesis, I borrowed Avia's description of Pasifika theatre practitioners as 'reverse chameleons'. In this chapter, I contemplate whether it is the nature of chameleons to try to blend in; in particular I ask whether practitioners' influences and positioning in the New Zealand theatre scene reveal if they try to blend in or stand out. Previous literature described Pasifika theatre as syncretic, because it is influenced by a combination of indigenous Pacific and Western performative styles. I argue that practitioners refer to indigenous art forms to connect with their Pacific heritage, in addition to using these art forms in practice. Furthermore, I propose that the growing number of collaborations with European theatre companies reveal that Pasifika theatre practitioners see European culture as fundamentally different from their own, and during such collaborations processes of cultural and artistic control become prominent. Finally, while Pasifika theatre practitioners still position Pasifika theatre on the fringe, Pasifika theatre has moved closer to the centres of New Zealand's theatre scene.

### 6.1 Influences of Pasifika theatre

Pasifika theatre was influenced by numerous art forms. Fale'aitu and oratory are identified by scholars as important influences on Pasifika theatre, and popular culture is mentioned in relation to Pasifika comedy (C. B Balme & Carstensen, 2001; Bannister, 2008; Carter, 2002; Liu, 2005; Millar, 2002; O'Donnell, 2007a). For the purpose of the coming discussion, the influence of Western theatre was selected because initial analysis revealed that Pasifika theatre frequently employs the structure and script of Western realist theatre. In this section I take a Eurocentric view of theatre in order to trace the influences of Western practices in Pasifika theatre. Such an approach overlooks some concerns of recent scholarship, especially theories that promote that the European historical and cultural model of theatre is universal. Aoki, Looser, and Casey speak up against the exclusion of pre-colonisation Pacific performance from the history of theatre, because such exclusion signals the continuing dominance of Eurocentric views (Aoki, 1992; Casey, 2009; Looser, 2011). Eurocentric views on theatre and performance have been a driving force of performance theory since the 1970s. Schechner in *Drama, Script, Theatre and Performance* drew a model of theatre that was applicable across cultures and sought to move away from the Eurocentric model (Schechner, 1973, p. 8). Schechner tried to grasp the essence of theatre, to make it applicable to a wide range of performance practices previously not considered as theatre. This study acknowledges that Pacific performance traditions may be considered theatre, but the ways in which practitioners incorporate Western traditions in performances is of greater importance for the discussion below. Therefore, the term 'theatre' refers specifically to the European construct of Western theatre.

### 6.1.1 The influence of Western theatre

Pacific theatre, which includes various theatre traditions in the Pacific region, has since colonisation been influenced by Western theatre, and analyses of plays reveal that its influence continues in Pasifika theatre. As discussed in Chapter 4, Western theatre was introduced to the Pacific Islands and to New Zealand by English colonisers. The structure of Pasifika theatre pieces frequently follows Western theatre writing conventions. Plays are often scripted and divided into acts and scenes. A significant percentage of Pasifika theatre practitioners graduated from Toi Whakaari, The New Zealand Drama School, or Unitech. Both of these institutions are based on a Western model. Theatre and drama education relies on the Western theatre model in New Zealand, which influenced the audience's as well as theatre makers' views on theatre. The script of theatre attendance, which in European theatre often includes purchasing a tickets, finding seats, intermissions, and clapping on the end of the show, is also adopted from Western theatre, and is different from Pacific conventions.

Western theatre was not mentioned as either a traditional or a new art form in interviews, in fact, it was not mentioned at all. In contrast to the total silence surrounding Western theatre's influence, practitioners frequently mentioned *fale'aitu*, the Samoan clowning tradition. Practitioners did not express interest in experimenting with forms of Western theatre either. The implication of this silence is that Western theatre is considered the norm, a given in Pasifika theatre. The only time Western theatre conventions were mentioned was when practitioners elaborated on the difference between the Pasifika and European audience. In Pasifika theatre, audience and performers are separated just like in Western theatre. However, in Pasifika theatre there is more interaction between performers and audience. Practitioners argued that audiences react differently, because they follow Pacific traditions (KIG; CAR\_A; MAN). A reaction to a dance during *Tautai* exemplifies this difference: Kightley, who directed the play, recalled that during one performance an audience member stood up, walked up to the dancing actor, and placed money on the stage. The reason for this behaviour was that in the dance's original context, audience members would stick money on the dancer's oiled body. In addition to this example, Wendt also described differences between European and Pasifika audience reactions: 'the audience had different reactions if it was predominantly Pakeha audience, if it was predominantly Pacific audience' (WEN). Pasifika audience members commented and laughed loudly, which demonstrates how audience-performer interactions were more intimate in Pasifika theatre than in contemporary Western theatre. Thus, while historically and structurally Pasifika theatre follows Western theatre conventions, differences in performer-audience interactions question the degree to which Pasifika theatre really has adopted Western theatre conventions. Thus, the dominance of the Western theatre model may be

considered both a natural progression and a choice. A large proportion of practitioners and the audience are acculturated to New Zealand culture to some degree, and consequently incorporation of Western theatre conventions is to be expected. However, the artists are agents because they can decide the degree to which they incorporate Western and Pacific performance elements in their work. Most notable, however, is the degree to which practitioners accept Western models and conventions as part of the natural order of things; indeed it is only the (Pasifika) audience that questions this when they bring traditional practices to the theatrical space. Furthermore, while practitioners find such reversals amusing, they still characterise these incidents as examples of lacking education with 'real theatre conventions'.

### **6.1.2 The influences of indigenous art forms**

Pacific theatre 'is a distinctive intercultural form' and attention should be paid to 'implicitly referencing, and resonating with a tradition tied more directly to indigenous cultural histories' argued Looser in her description of theatre in the Pacific Islands (Looser, 2011@539). The indigenous art form that came up most often in the interviews and in scholarly literature on Pasifika theatre was, as noted above, *fale'aitu*, the Samoan form of clowning (C. B Balme & Carstensen, 2001; O'Donnell, 2007b; O'Donnell & Tweddle, 2003a); KIG; MAI; CAR ; WEN; LEE; AUM; RIL; IFO; HEK ).

It is not surprising that a Samoan indigenous tradition became the go-to indigenous reference for practitioners, because Samoan theatre practitioners dominate Pasifika theatre, and because they frequently collaborate with other Pasifika ethnicities. Perhaps it is more surprising that an overwhelming majority of practitioners never saw *fale'aitu* in its traditional setting and form, as they were born in New Zealand. Nevertheless, I identified three sources of contact based on the interviews. Migrants from Samoa often had recordings of *fale'aitu* performances, and second-generation practitioners watched their parents' and grandparents' tapes. These practitioners learned the styles, characters, and scripts of *fale'aitu* from the previous generation and from recordings. In addition, Pacific Theatre organised a workshop for theatre practitioners with a *fale'aitu* master from Samoa in 1996 (Carter, 2002); KIG). Kightley remembered that other members of The Naked Samoans participated in the workshop and it (rather vaguely) influenced the company's work. It is worth noting that the workshop has taken on a somewhat mythical significance; it figures as a milestone in Pasifika theatre history, but none of the practitioners interviewed could specify what exactly happened and how it was significant for subsequent developments. As a final point, a few practitioners researched performing arts traditions in the Pacific Islands, and used the findings in their work (KIG).



Since neither participants nor literature were in any way precise about the exact mechanisms whereby fale'aitu exerted an influence, it is worth briefly investigating which aspects of Pasifika theatre bear traces of the art form. One possibility is that fale'aitu determined the gender arrangement of comedy troupes; Kightley for one claimed that The Naked Samoans became an all-male company because it was founded after the 1996 fale'aitu workshop. Historically, fale'aitu performers were of the same gender, and Pasifika comedy troupes are typically all male, e.g. The Laughing Samoans, The Naked Samoans, The Brownies, and Electric Koko Zoids to name but a few (J. Kneubuhl & Hereniko, 1993). However, the link between gender arrangement and fale'aitu remains tentative and largely unsubstantiated, because the gender balance of the troupes might equally reflect the patriarchal structure of Pasifika communities. In any case, there is an overwhelming dominance of male practitioners in Pasifika theatre, and there is only one example of an all-female troupe, or more accurately, duo: Pani and Pani (Elliott & Gray, 2000); POL).

Fale'aitu is said to influence Pasifika theatre's style of subversive humour and entertainment (Millar, 2002). Pacific Underground, Kila Kokonut Krew, The Naked Samoans, Electric Koko Zoids, and The Laughing Samoans are companies that use humour to criticise society and Pasifika cultures. In *Romeo and Tusi*, the sleazy minister's appearance is an opportunity for subversive humour. The minister is continuously collecting money for the church, and admits to retaining considerable sums for personal use. When a character wins a prize, the minister says: 'here is your prize. Minus a donation toward the cost of my Sky Bill' (Kightley et al., 2000). The play criticises ministers who misappropriate donations, and people who donate without questioning the custom. Another source of subversive humour in the play is parenting; while children are continuously told to do housework, the mothers gamble, and the fathers spend most of their time in the pub:

Mrs Aiu (mother)	Well I know how happy you are because I was coming to the play. But I'm sorry, the women's group fund-raising committee has a special meeting that I have to go to.
Tusi (daughter)	Where is it?
Mrs Aiu (mother)	At the casino.

(Kightley et al., 2000)

The main character's mother considers missing her daughter's school play in order to go to the casino to gamble with her friends at what is termed a 'women's group fund-raising committee'. Parenting, gambling, and phoney ministers are some of the primary sources of subversive humour in Pacific Underground's other plays.

Another example of subversive humour is The Laughing Samoans' skit *Collect Call* (2009). The skit caricatures relationships between Samoans in Samoa and Samoans in New Zealand, in particular

their obligation to support their family in Samoa. When Tala's uncle calls her to donate to a wedding in his village in Samoa, Tala tries to object. She argues that the uncle does not even know who is getting married, and then compares donating to relatives in Samoa to sponsoring a child. She continues: 'at least I know her name, her age [...], and where does she come from[sic]' (The Laughing Samoans, 2009, p. 2:57). The skit portrays how Tala and her uncle try to manipulate each other, using sayings and circular reasoning to convince each other. In so doing, Tala's and her uncle's views on community and expectations toward migrants are juxtaposed, and both characters are portrayed as fallible and selfish.

The above examples share their energy and subversive humour with fale'aitu traditions. An example of a fale'aitu script described by Kneubuhl depicts Petelo the clown and a boy stealing imaginary taro. After they are caught and beaten up by the villagers, Petelo exclaims that it is only a play, and they are only actors. After the stage is deserted, however, Petelo and the boy return to steal the taro (J. Kneubuhl & Hereniko, 1993, p. 102). Another sketch mocked the growing independence of women and feminisation of men (J. Kneubuhl & Hereniko, 1993). These fale'aitu sketches in their use of subversive humour are indeed reminiscent of the Pasifika plays described above. Pacific Underground, The Laughing Samoans, and especially The Naked Samoans also use physical humour employ as is clear in their minimal use of props. Pasifika plays and fale'aitu, similarly to Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, use subversive humour to undermine social hierarches.

The only Pasifika play that directly incorporated a fale'aitu sketch is *The Songmaker's chair* (Wendt, 2004). Peteola, the grandfather, and Malaga, the grandmother, perform a sketch in the family talent quest:

Peseola    Hey, pardner, remema le time lea ga alu ai lou NO-Speak-English brother 'e su'e saga job?

Malaga    Hey, uso, 'e lelei le English 'a lo'u brother! 'O lou kamā legā 'e lē iloa se Igilisi e kasi!<sup>47</sup>

(Wendt, 2004, pp. 59-60)

After a few more lines the characters perform a synchronised mock-karate fight. The sketch is similar to fale'aitu performances in that it combines physical and verbal comedy with subversive humour by making fun of early migrants' English.

In addition to the direct and possible influences of fale'aitu, practitioners' references to fale'aitu have symbolic meanings attached to them. Typically practitioners referred to fale'aitu only to

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<sup>47</sup>Translation by Wendt from *The Songmaker's chair*:

Peseola: Remember that time your NO-Speak-English brother went looking for a job?

Malaga: Hey, bro, my brother's English is great! It's your father who doesn't know any English!

explain its meaning, 'house of spirits'. In traditional fale'aitu, when a controversial topic came up, it was understood that statements were authored by spirits rather than performers, which exculpated performers from responsibility. Kightley joked that The Naked Samoans tried to refer to the connection between their work and the influence of the spirits:

In NS, when we started our stuff was quite risqué and full on and anarchic and people used to get quite offended by it. They [spirits] used to be our excuses, it's like fale'aitu, it's not us on stage it's the spirits, can't be angry at us. (KIG)

Admittedly, blaming controversial messages on 'the spirits' was perhaps more humorous or tongue in cheek; indeed, when probed, Kightley sheepishly admitted that 'It didn't really work' (KIG). The connection between spirits and fale'aitu is thought of as symbolic. When The Naked Samoans cite fale'aitu as an inspiration, it gains yet another symbolic meaning because the troupe creates and performs in New Zealand, where social and spiritual connections are Christian and European. In contemporary Pasifika culture, the hierarchical structures of communities are looser than in the Pacific Islands, and links to the spirit world bear little or no relevance. The interpretation of 'the house of spirits' provides an example of the abstract influence of fale'aitu. Other references were abstract, disconnected from any real link to 'a spirit world; as a rule they remained unexplained in interview. 'Like in fale'aitu' or 'fale'aitu style' was a frequently used phrase that is now as rarely elaborated upon and mentioned out of context, similar to the phrase 'like back in the Islands'. These references should be interpreted as an attempt to symbolically connect with a largely lost island heritage.

While practitioners claim their work continues traditional practices, in reality they are reinventing fale'aitu, redefining it in the New Zealand context. In practice, the term is largely symbolic, and bears little reference to the connotations or indeed concrete reality of Island beliefs. For those Pasifika audience who grew up in New Zealand and had no contact with fale'aitu in its traditional form, the work of these companies fulfils a similar function to fale'aitu, and Pasifika theatre practitioners may be considered traditors who actively participate in the passing on and reinvention of 'traditions'.

### **Oratory**

Pacific cultures had rich oral traditions before, during, and after colonisation. Oratory was a way of storytelling, constructing and performing histories, and maintaining community relations, and family ties. Oratory was linked to the theatricality of everyday life by Albert Wendt, who illustrated his account by the example of an informal visit: welcoming a visitor and greeting the host included formalised speech and behaviours, 'because back in Samoa there is oratory, you have been to someone's home, they are welcoming you in a semiformal way with oratory and you reply back and it becomes a poem' (WEN). Practitioners do not have doubts that theatre became popular because

Pacific life was already theatrical, and Wendt argued that Pasifika people's 'love of theatre comes from our love of theatre anyway in everyday life' (WEN). The theatricality of Samoan life therefore is linked to Pasifika theatre, and it is then argued that even though Western theatre as an art form was new at some point in Samoa, the concept of performance in the Pacific is all encompassing and extends to Pasifika theatre.

Oratory as a formalised performance tradition is linked to Pasifika theatre in practitioners' reflections, and Carter specifically spoke of Pasifika theatre as a continuation of the oral tradition: 'Pacific theatre is claiming theatre as part of tradition', which originates in Pasifika people's 'natural ability [...] to tell stories' (CAR\_A). Therefore, Pasifika theatre is interpreted as a continuation of a pre-existing tradition that incorporates Western elements, rather than an entirely new art form introduced by the colonisers. Cremona describes a similar dynamic in post-colonial Malta, where the continuation of farce traditions is 'part of the cultural memory of popular theatre that feeds popular entertainment today' (Cremona, 2008, p. 123). Unlike in Malta, where practitioners reach back to introduced art forms, practitioners use indigenous popular traditions. Descriptions of theatre as a continuation of an oral tradition imply that Pasifika theatre originates from a Pacific rather than a Western art form. The degree to which assertions that Pasifika theatre derives more or less linearly from pre-colonisation art forms are spurious is a moot point. The claims to such a link must at least in part be seen as a post-colonial attempt to rewrite Pasifika theatre history, to validate and promote a Pasifika identity through theatre.

Practitioners use the terms 'oratory' and 'Pacific worldview' as virtually synonymous concepts. The latter includes Pacific languages and Pacific notions of time and space, and is cited as a generic influence on Pasifika theatre. Nawalowalo incorporated 'Pacific time' based on light and water in *Vula*. The use of notions of 'Pacific time' and space establish a connection between the Pacific and Pasifika theatre, and reinforces the link between the Pacific and the diaspora in New Zealand. Claims that Pasifika theatre is directly influenced by oratory should be taken with a pinch of salt, as practitioners have stretched the meaning of the term 'oratory' so far as to include abstract notions such as 'Pacific worldviews'. The 'style' of *fale'aitu* was often used interchangeably with 'Pacific style', and with Pacific oratory to refer to practitioners' heritage. Especially emerging practitioners used the terms interchangeably and inconsequentially to argue that Pacific styles are embedded in Pasifika culture and therefore influenced their work. Practitioners argued that formalised speech patterns, in particular from Samoa, are incorporated in Pasifika theatre, (e.g. structure and delivery). Nonetheless, whereas this argument is applicable to *The Songmaker's chair*, the majority of Pasifika plays do not include formalised speech patterns; they do, however, include poetic speech patterns,

which might be what practitioners have in mind. In addition, practitioners' use of 'worldview' as a synonym for 'oral traditions' further blurred any distinction in meaning between oral traditions and oratory.

The education of practitioners' and their Pasifika audience makes it clear that what is considered direct influences are in reality symbolic. A review of the practitioners' background reveals that they were without exception educated in New Zealand, where theatre and theatre education are modelled on European theatre traditions. Practitioners, especially Leilua, pointed out that theatre is not traditional, and is unfamiliar to the Pasifika audience:

I want Pacific people to be educated in theatre and theatre practices and be able to say: 'I been to a play', and be part of an audience and a live performance of theatre. [...] I want everybody to be able to experience that, Pacific people to come to the theatre and see Pacific stories on the stage. Told well and professionally. (LEI)

Leilua's emphasis on professional theatre illustrates the difference between her work and the amateur performances Pasifika audience members are familiar with. Theatre is contrasted with performance, which is described as part of Pasifika people's lives, and practitioners, including Muagututi'a, Kightley, and Ifopo, emphasised that as children they performed in amateur productions that re-told stories from the Bible in Bible School and on White Sunday. Therefore, while performance is considered indigenous by practitioners, theatre is theorised as unknown for Pasifika people. The implications of the difference is that practitioners claim Pasifika theatre as a continuation of oral traditions, and at the same time regard its form as foreign to Pasifika people.

Pasifika theatre is seen in contradictory terms by practitioners; it is both a natural continuation and the result of foreign influence. This paradox is further complicated by ambiguity of practitioners' terms, leaving it unclear whether practitioners see Pasifika theatre as indigenous or foreign. This contradiction marks the effect of displacement and colonisation, because while Pasifika theatre continues to fulfil similar functions and employs similar tools to oratory, much of the form and style is European. Affirmation of the link between indigenous and contemporary performance is nevertheless a reinforcement of practitioners' Samoan and Pasifika identity and heritage.

### **6.1.3 Popular culture**

The influence of popular culture on Pasifika theatre is highly visible and significant. Yet, in contrast to the repeated references to *fale'aitu*, the influence of popular culture on Pasifika theatre remains understudied in literature (although see Wallace 2007; O'Donnell 2007b; Bannister 2008 for notable exceptions).

Popular culture influenced Pasifika theatre through the structural influence of film on Pasifika comedy and on Pasifika plays. Indeed, Riley specifically cited films as one of his greatest influences, both in terms of structure and content: 'my play is like a film' and went on to explain how a scene featuring 'a bunch of trashy flatmates that get stoned and spy on their neighbours and get locked up in the basement and left down there. That's pretty much the whole premise of that' (RIL). In Pasifika plays scenes are often cut rather than interlinked and continuous, just as in movies. Victor Rodger's play, *My Name is Gary Cooper* (2007a), jumps back and forth between three time periods, and memories break with linear structure. It starts in Auckland in 2000, but within minutes the audience is transported to Los Angeles in 1973, and then to Samoa in the 1950s. The time and location continue to change, often mid-scene. During a conversation between Joel and Jennifer, the host's children, and visitor, Gary, 'Jennifer and Joel fade into the darkness... as a bruised and bloodied Teilua stumbles onto the stage' (Rodger, 2007a, p. 28). The three-act structure is often abandoned; for instance in *Romeo and Tusi* by Kightley and Ifopo the act structure is replaced with fifteen scenes. While the traditional structures of climax and resolution are present, the play is held together by the 'play within a play' structure, mirroring of *Romeo and Juliet*'s, and a reoccurring theme song 'Pure love'.

Popular culture references, including music, jokes, and movies, are also frequent in Pasifika theatre. Michael Jackson was cited by Muagututi'a and her peers as a formative influence, therefore when the musician died, 'tribute to Michael Jackson' was incorporated in *Angels*:

And from then on it was a huge big Michael Jackson re-assertance [sic]. [...]. So we added the Michael Jackson part in the play as a tribute. It wasn't part of the original, wasn't written, it was in the costume, his character. (MUA\_T)

Changes in costume and character included 'MJ motives like Moon walk and white gloves', which were recognisable as Michael Jackson influences (Journal entry, 23 July 2009). Similarly to the tribute to Michael Jackson in *Angels*, Victoria Schmidt's play, *Music and Me* incorporates popular music (Schmidt, 2012). The play abandons migration stories, and discusses contemporary issues including drug abuse, illness, and poverty. The main character is an 'ex-street hustler and the biggest Madonna stan you'll find'. References to Madonna continue throughout the play: the drag queen is dressed like the young Madonna, and Madonna's *Holiday* introduces scene three (Schmidt, 2012 p. 3). Schmidt's play is one of the most recent plays to that reflect the experiences of New Zealand-born Pasifika people who are increasingly affected by global pop-culture. The Naked Samoans' work in theatre, but especially on television, is influenced by American comedy; this is evident in the South Park-style characters and humour, politically incorrect humour, and frequent references to ethnicity and race.

Global popular culture's influence is growing, which prompts questions about Pasifika theatre's future. Gómez-Peña, performance artist and activist, describes an already prominent performance practice that is labelled as multiculturalism, but refuses to deal with issues of race, ethnicity, and social differences beyond the surface.

This new transnational multiculturalism is actually devoid of real people of colours, true artists, outcasts and revolutionaries. The very diversity it claims to celebrate merely performs the passive roles of glossy images and exotic background, played out by nameless backup actors and dancers. (Gómez-Peña, 2001, p. 12)

The lack of real people and profusion of nameless actors is similar to colonial representations of indigenous people (e.g. the stereotype of the black mass or Spivak's 'blank informant') Such development is already highlighted in Pasifika comedy on television by Anae (Rees, 2006). She argues that Pasifika comedy, specifically *Bro'Town*, revisits negative stereotypes, and therefore is a step backward in the Pacific self-determination project. The trend is not yet evident in Pasifika theatre, although the increasingly popular Pasifika comedy troupes The Naked Samoans and Electric Koko Zoids are influenced by South Park style comedy. Global popular culture's influence combined with self-deprecating humour characteristic to these troupes could result in stronger negative stereotypes. In addition, popular culture may impact the presentation of multiculturalism. If social issues are only mentioned superficially and outdated stereotypes are revisited, theatre would not be a source of social change. Superficial performances of multiculturalism are inherently contradictory to practitioners' vision of Pasifika theatre as a source of positive social change.

Mimicry, as a post-colonial trait of Pasifika theatre was emphasised by the literature (Balme, 2001, Warrington, 2009, Houlahan, 2009). Mimicry is understood as the copying of the person in power, including dress code, language, and art form, and mimicry is an example of how colonisers invaded even the imagination, and fantasies of their audience, the colonised (Bhabha, 1994b; Hannerz, 1992, p. 236). According to these definitions, Shakespeare's plays performed in Samoa and early Pasifika Shakespeare productions were examples of mimicry. In the post-colonial context, Pasifika theatre may be considered mimicry, as the majority of the plays are written in English and follow a Western realist model.

Mimicry also has subversive functions, which Pasifika theatre demonstrates, for instance in its use of stereotypes (Warrington, 2009). The body of a non-European actor on stage, in a theatre, with the audience making comments, laughing loudly and walking up to the stage is also subversive. Pasifika theatre is subversive because practitioners and audience members are conscious of a reversal: 'once upon a time a PI would get to the theatre and maybe not get the jokes, and now it was reversed, and

we explained jokes to the others', Kightley explained (KIG). The change from feeling out of place to appropriating the art form and being in power is subversive mimicry.

#### **6.1.4 Preliminary conclusions on the influences of Pasifika theatre**

Pasifika theatre is described in literature as syncretic because it combined indigenous and Western performance traditions (C. B Balme, 1999; C. B Balme & Carstensen, 2001). The evidence presented above supports this assessment. Fale'aitu did influence some Pasifika productions, but frequently the links are tentative and unsubstantiated, which I find supports Wallace's criticism that research literature on Pasifika theatre is dominated by exoticisms that overly stresses the actual influence of fale'aitu (Wallace, 2007).

The analysis above takes this further, suggesting that references to fale'aitu and oratory are occasionally symbolic, but more commonly used as catch-all labels for the Pasifika heritage; thus they link current practitioners to their ancestral roots. While Western theatre is used and accepted, practitioners claim Pasifika theatre as part of Pacific traditions. Whether the connection is real or symbolic, in postcolonial terms it is an attempt to reclaim history. For the postcolonial theatre maker, theatre refers to Western performance, yet it is inherently associated with indigenous performance, as pointed out by Crow (1996). In this study practitioners used references to indigenous performance forms to connect Pasifika theatre to Pacific cultures, whilst still operating within the framework of Western theatre. Therefore materials from both cultures were drawn upon, which bears resemblance to Soyinka and other post-colonial theatre practitioners (Soyinka, 1976).

### **6.2 Pasifika theatre's position in New Zealand's theatre scene**

What is the position of Pasifika theatre in the New Zealand theatre scene? I argue that practitioners primarily see their work as marginalised, but there is a recognised move toward the centre. I further propose that social and cultural tensions surface during collaborations with European companies.

#### **6.2.1 From Pan-Pasifika to ethnicity-specific identification**

Pasifika theatre expanded considerably and underwent significant change in the last thirty years. The changes include a growing number of collaborations with professional theatres, larger audience, international tours, and television and film appearances. Simultaneously, Pasifika theatre started to diversify, and as discussed in Chapter 4, there are more women playwrights. Especially in the early years Pasifika theatre was dominated by Samoan theatre makers, but since then Pasifika practitioners from different ethnicities have gained prominence. The description of these trends alone, however, is not sufficient to portray the diversity of Pasifika theatre; therefore the following paragraphs explore the three main ways practitioners characterised their work.



The majority of second-generation theatre practitioners described Pasifika theatre primarily as Pasifika, whilst acknowledging that their inspiration was life in New Zealand:

Keep in mind; you are a PI first, before you are a New Zealander. Even though you are born in New Zealand, you are a PI first. You cannot forget your culture, who you are, that would be like disrespecting our journey and our families. (MAN)

The emphasis on ethnicity and culture over nationality is an overarching theme. Practitioners often explained that the importance of migration as a historical point of reference and ancestry, central in Pacific cultures, are reasons why New Zealand is secondary to Pasifika identification. Interestingly, in this study theatre makers from mixed ethnic background, European and a Pasifika ethnicity, identified themselves and their work as Pasifika, with one exception where the practitioner established a connection with his extended Samoan family only as an adult. Even though he did not identify himself or his work primarily as Samoan or Pasifika, he felt he belonged to the Samoan community and took up financial opportunities available to Pasifika theatre practitioners. His story resembles that of Noah in *Sons* who embarked on a journey to find his lost father and heritage.

The labels 'Pasifika theatre practitioner' and 'Pasifika theatre' received varying responses from practitioners because the Pasifika label was seen as limiting. The limitation was explained as a value judgement attached to ethnic minority art and by the judgement and stereotyping the Pasifika label invites in New Zealand. Avia expressed her frustration as follows: 'sometimes I get impatient, because I'm often described as a Samoan or Pacific Island performer, and it annoys me, because it feels like a limitation, being stereotyped like that' (AVI). Avia then further explained that her work was not limited to Pasifika themes, which other practitioners, such as Wendt, Kightley, and Muagututi'a, also emphasised. The labels also carry perceived quality differences, argued practitioners, as New Zealand work is considered to be of higher standard than Pasifika work: 'I'm not just Pacific Islander, in a group with other Pacific Islander people, I know I can be put in with the rest of them' (AVI). An inherent contradiction unfolds between distinctions based on recognition and ethnicity. Avia divided Pasifika and 'the rest of them', which suggests a division along ethnic lines, where the 'rest of them' refers to European theatre practitioners. However, even Avia did not fully separate ethnicity and quality; while she argues that she considered herself good enough to be with the 'rest of them', her argument still suggested a hierarchical structure where quality was judged on ethnicity between Pasifika and the rest.

The contradiction above may imply the continuation of the perception of Western artists' superiority in the post-colonial context. The dichotomy resonates with Michel Tuffery's *Pisupo lua afe* (1994), a statue of a cow made of corned beef tins. The statue draws attention to the legacy of colonialism: corned beef was connected to status, and traditional cuisine was abandoned for Western imports,

which resulted in loss of traditions, along with health and economic problems. Is the Pasifika label, similarly to traditional food, perceived as inferior by practitioners and by society? My experiences in a gallery opening in Auckland in 2010 exemplify that the situation is not so clear-cut because indigenous and Western forms often merge, in food as in art:

Marylin [Kohlhase] arrived with big shopping bags and we started to prepare the food. I was making salad from corned beef, [...] Marylin showed me her family recipe and we put coconut cream and some other things, which I promised not to tell anyone. [...] It tasted really good in the end. (Journal Entry, 2010 June 24)

Corned beef is a Western import and became a symbol of colonisation. The difference in quality is recognised in contemporary society as the statue's message shows, but distinctions between Western and indigenous products are still present, with ethnicity as a dividing factor. The divide is, at least according to some practitioners, also linked to qualitative differences between the Western and other.

Identification with specific ethnicities, beyond pan-ethnic identification, is a growing trend which Carter describes as Pasifika theatre becoming 'more personal' (CAR\_A). The first decades of Pasifika theatre were dominated by Samoan theatre makers and mixed ethnicity groups that represented a Pan-Pasifika identity, and no distinction was made between different ethnicities. As the audience and the theatre making community grew, works became more diverse. Several practitioners emphasised that their work was specific to their ethnic identity. Diana Fuemana described her work as Niuean-New Zealander theatre rather than Pasifika theatre (CHA). The first full-length Tongan play (*Kingdom of Lote*) was performed by Kila Kokonut Krew. Iaheto Ah-Hi's play (*Tau Tai*) is based on Tokelauan culture and heritage; and Nina Nawaloloalo created Fijian theatre. While it is a recent development and therefore any conclusions must be tentative, Pacific ethnicities were mentioned by practitioners, which is a sign that Pasifika theatre may be moving away from Pan-Pasifika ideology and is becoming more ethnicity-specific.

The paragraphs above reveal that practitioners' categorisation of their work varies, but the primary distinguishing factor is ethnicity. While the label Pasifika is repeatedly used, some practitioners emphasise the diversity of Pasifika theatre and resist pan-ethnic ideology. Pasifika and New Zealand theatre are separated, and while Pasifika theatre is recognised as unique, the label is also seen as limiting by practitioners, which may be a legacy of colonialism.

### **6.2.2 Inter-ethnic collaborations (European-Pasifika)**

Since the end of the 1990s collaboration between Pasifika theatre practitioners and professional European theatres in New Zealand has increased. Victor Rodger, Albert Wendt, Nathaniel Lees, Pacific Underground, Diana Fuemana, and Kila Kokonut Krew collaborated with European

companies. The collaborations differed from previous collaborations in that Pasifika theatre practitioners worked with European theatre makers; previous collaborations had mainly been with theatre makers from different Pasifika ethnicities and Maori.

During these collaborations, some practitioners found working together problematic for various reasons. Differences in ethnicity and gender in the production team were cited as the source of misunderstandings and 'incorrect' readings of the text. The perspective of the two writers on *Angels* (2009), a collaboration between Pacific Underground and Court Theatre (Christchurch), exemplified the differences. The play was written by two female New Zealand-born Samoan theatre makers, Tanya Muagututi'a and Joy Vaele. The theme is Samoan women's experiences in New Zealand, and the writers stressed the importance of the combination of gender and ethnicity:

But there are some women's perspectives that can't be told through male voices or collectives. As a woman, you have all these layers and relationships. [...] Coming from a Pacific perspective it is our values and culture. Women look after everyone, cleaning etc., and it is not just about Pacific cultures. (MUA\_T)

The play aims to rewrite stereotypes of Pasifika women by depicting different choices and unusual careers from women writers' perspective. The writers expressed regret that the director's different ethnicity and gender shifted their original focus. As a member of the production team remembered: 'I would have preferred a Samoan female director who grew up in church and experienced that stuff' (ANO1). She also expressed her disappointment that the director did not convey the essence of the story: 'I don't think it went anywhere, worked with where the story should be going' (ANO1). The writers emphasised that they took the initiative and steered the director in the 'right direction', due to what they identified as the director's lack of cultural knowledge.

In stark contrast with the writers, Gilbert, the director of *Angels*, thought cultural differences were insignificant. Although he was from a European background, he had experience with Pasifika culture and did not consider himself an outsider:

I guess being Palangi, it is fine by me. I was not in a foreign environment, I worked there as an actor before, and I knew know the people at the Court, and also knowing some of PU people, so I guess I was able to negotiate the two worlds, I think. (GIL)

Gilbert saw himself as a 'translator' between the two companies and cultures, because of his familiarity with both contexts. However, he was seen by Pacific Underground members as an outsider. Because the writers acknowledge that Gilbert did not belong to Court Theatre either, the distinction is made based on cultural difference and ethnicity rather than troupe allegiance.

When Pasifika companies collaborate with European companies, the needs of the European audience are prioritised. Although *The Songmaker's Chair's* production was primarily Samoan,

Wendt points out that Auckland Theatre Company and the dramaturg were from a European background. He recalls that the dramaturg considered the play too 'anthropological' (WEN), because it contained Samoan language and references to Samoan religion and life. 'Anthropological' may mean that the play was research based, and contained a large amount of social and cultural references. Another interpretation of 'anthropological' in the context of a European theatre may be to mark the difference between European and Pasifika culture. While Pasifika works were performed and valued for their difference on the one hand, on the other hand they were discouraged from being excessively exotic, and encouraged to remain within the boundaries of European knowledge and interest (see also Chapter 8). A similar idea of satisfying European audience's expectations was expressed by members of Court Theatre when they talked about *Angels*, because Court Theatre largely 'relies on audiences with subscription', who are mainly European (ANO2). However, in the case of *The Songmaker's Chair*, unlike in the case of *Angels*, the play was produced without alterations.

### 6.2.3 Collaborative style

Pasifika theatre makers incorporate collaboration in every stage of theatre making. An example for the total involvement of theatre makers is the making of *A Frigate Bird Sings*. Lees was inspired by an incident of abuse of a fa'fafine he had seen on K Road.<sup>48</sup> He discussed the incident with Kightley, and Kightley and Small decided to write a play about fa'fafines. Lees took part in every stage of the production; he helped write and finally directed the play.

Devised theatre was seen as ideal for collaborations because it allowed practitioners to be involved during the entire production. During the development of *Vula*, the actresses brought their own background and experiences to the play. Nawalowalo, the director, remembered that 'the actual making was very collaborative; I worked closely with [...] the original women. [...] That is the inspiration. It is so interesting that while you are doing something quite personal and it becomes universal in a way' (NAW). The actresses were from different Pasifika cultures, and both director and actresses brought their personal stories, interest, and artistic background. In the end, the collaboration enriched the story, by becoming 'universal in a way', and was not a source of conflict.

A Kila Kokonut Krew rehearsal reveals a similar collaborative style, but while members of the company work collaboratively, when working with emerging performers, there was a hierarchy between practitioners. My journal entry describes a rehearsal:

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<sup>48</sup> K Road is a street in Central Auckland, its original name is Karangahape Road. It is known for its eclectic mix of galleries and shopping, but it has retained some of its reputation as Auckland's red light district.

Members of the company are scattered in a church's hall, leaving and entering, but someone is always here. Anapela [Polataiavo] and Stacey [Leilua] are sitting behind and old desk, and opposite them are the 'contestants'. Anapela comments on their style and give them advice. [...] After Leilua's interview, we are sitting in the hall with Anapela, when some of the New Kila Playwrights start to rehearse choreography. It is five men; they discuss and copy each other while making up moves. [...] There is a lot of noise, laughter, Stacey joins the actors, and they all work on the choreography. Next time we look up, they have a whole sequence. Anapela comments and then scolds them for being too loud. (Journal entry, 2010, October 7)

The hierarchy between members of the company and contestants is clear, especially because the show is set up like a talent show. In the case of the Young Kila playwrights, the gap is significantly smaller, but while they work on their separate pieces, members of the Kila Kokonut Krew give them advice. Even though in this example differences between members and non-members imply a hierarchical relationship, the interactions show that collaborative style does not mean lack of task distribution and leadership.

Collaborative working styles were described as organic to Pasifika people. The Naked Samoans, as Heka and Kightley pointed out, had a collaborative working style from the start. Heka described collaboration as characteristic to Pasifika cultures: 'Pacific Islanders have a specific way, a collective way of writing stories, like Oscar and the Naked' (HEK). The 'special way', can also be described as collaboration influenced by collectivism. Members of The Naked Samoans brainstormed, wrote, and rehearsed together, as Kightley remembered: 'we thought oh man, we can work together. [...] Easiest thing, get together, write a story and rehearse it, stage and such an organic process, goes back hundreds of years, [I] love it' (KIG). The collaborative process is described as easy and natural because in is traced back to practitioners' Pacific heritage.

Collaborative Pasifika working styles were different from European companies' working methods, which became visible when Pasifika theatre practitioners worked with European companies. Practitioners reveal that Pacific Underground members' collaboration with Court Theatre intensified the differences. Practitioners explained that members of Pacific Underground 'are used to do a lot of things, multitasking' (ANO1). Writing, production, directing, acting, funding, music and design and so on are all organised by company members. Pacific Underground members took part in various parts of the production of *Angels*, they wrote the play, provided music and acted in it. However, they remarked that tasks were distributed differently from Pacific Underground's usual collaborative style:

From a PU perspective we write, and create, and direct, and have total control over everything we do. So working together with another company and having a director who worked toward his own vision in terms of his interpretation [...] It's always a challenge

because most of it is brilliant, but there were some aspect where were disappointed...  
(Muagututi'a)

The individual vision of the director in *Angels* is juxtaposed to the company's collective vision. The process of theatre making with Court Theatre was compared to being part of the 'Court machine' (ANO1), and to a manufacturing process where there is a clear task distribution between all participating members of Pacific Underground. Members of Court Theatre described the difference as 'PU works very spontaneously; they have a lot of air of freedom to work on the development process. We work on strict schedules all the time' (ANO2). The different working styles are not attributed to cultural factors but to institutional differences between Court Theatre and theatre companies on the fringe.

#### **6.2.4 Collaboration and control**

Collaborations between European and Pasifika companies often evoke issues of artistic and cultural control during the working process. Artistic control was regarded by practitioners as an important factor in collaborations. During the production of *Angels*, Pacific Underground members felt that they had limited artistic control over the production. The interviews reveal several reasons why practitioners felt that they do not have artistic control. One reason was that the writers, Vaele and Muagututi'a, had to audition for the roles they played in the play. The differences in production style between Court Theatre and Pacific Underground also resulted in feeling of lack of involvement for Pacific Underground members. Pacific Underground members were used to collaborating throughout the production process, while the Court Theatre had a clear division of tasks. The Court Theatre employed a director, a musical director and a costume designer, and this division of tasks contrasted with Pacific Underground productions where tasks were distributed internally and executed together. Muagututi'a described the feeling of lack of involvement: 'I feel that we weren't been involved so much', and she compared the production process to a manufacturing process:

The hardest thing for me was that the machine started, the Court was involved and by the time it started they have done all the preproduction. [...] I felt like I couldn't contribute enough even though I've co-written the whole show, because we're used to doing everything. (MUA\_T)

The collaborative style of Pasifika theatre makers is juxtaposed with the individualistic style of the 'Court machine'. This difference is one of the reasons why Pacific Underground members felt powerless.

The writers also felt that their lack of influence on selecting directors and actors influenced the play negatively. A cast member pointed out that the writer's intentions should be respected: 'when you write a play, you write it like who you want as a director, who you are writing to who you want to act'. In *Angels* the writers 'asked for a four Samoan women, [but] got Maori, Samoan and Tongan'

(ANO1). The lack of influence on the selection, and the consequent inability to align the writer's understanding with the director's made the writers tense, creating a feeling of powerlessness.

Pacific Underground members expressed distress because they lacked artistic control. However, as a member of Court Theatre pointed out, different expectations resulting from different working styles was due to the inexperience of the two companies in cross-cultural collaboration: 'we learned that you have to be upfront from the beginning. And that's not necessarily easy to do for some Samoan people' (OCO). Different ethnicity and culture are cited as complicating collaborations, which separation of European and Pasifika theatre makers and the resulting inexperience intensifies.

Another form of control, based on ethnicity and culture, is visible in the description of working with European theatre companies. Pasifika people were seen as sharing the same life experiences, and outsiders were regarded as lacking knowledge and therefore unable to make decisions on Pasifika culture. The issue was foregrounded in the production of *Angels*. Court Theatre's costume designer prepared the clothes the characters were supposed to wear in the 1980s, based on what teenagers in New Zealand wore at the time. One member of the cast protested because Pasifika teenagers wore different clothes, as they had been 'taught to cover up' and 'never wore that because [they] were fresh back then, socks and high heels. It was different' (ANO1). The difference between Pasifika teenagers and New Zealand teenagers is marked by the 'freshness' of Pasifika youth, a reference to migration. Pacific Underground members questioned the authenticity of the costumes and suggested changes. Practitioners argued that the original costume choice demonstrated the European designer's lack of contact with and knowledge of Pasifika teenagers in the 1980s. Differences in what ministers wear also became a point of difference between the Samoan cast and European director.

One example is whether the pastor was wearing a collar or not. In *Angels*, Robert wanted the pastor to wear a collar, [...] But [pastors do not wear collars] in the Samoan community. Finally he didn't put it in. (ANO1)

The difference in the pastors' dress code is identified as important in Samoan culture, and is used as a point of difference from European churches. During the production, the director was associated with the outside culture and was urged to modify his stance. Fashion is described as a point of identification, and as a topic loaded with rules, traditions, and historical events. Fashion is also considered a difference in cultural knowledge on behalf of the European production team, a deficiency that is then corrected by Pasifika cast members.

Differences in traditions were also emphasised within the Pasifika community, but practitioners did not describe that these differences lead to conflict. The church was an important part of *Angels* and

the difference between what ministers and the youth wore in different churches is emphasised. On White Sundays

[They wore] white and red ribbon, or something like that. In *Angles* we had it in the White Sunday [scene]; in our church we never wore stuff like that. [...] Tanya and I are from different churches and there were a lot of things we didn't agree on. (ANO1)

The differences in what to wear on White Sundays indicate that there was not one unified Pasifika or even Samoan experience, and variations even exist. Practitioners' accepting approach to differences within Pasifika culture is in stark contrast with their emphasis on conflict between Pasifika and European cultures. Thus it seems it was not the dissimilarity that mattered the most but cultural differences were used to mark a Pasifika in-group and an European out-group.

The distinction between outsiders and insiders based on ethnicity was the main source of difference, and Pasifika practitioners tried to influence these differences during the productions. Practitioners put forward an argument that the director should have maintained the cultural authenticity throughout the production of *Angels*. Failing to be 'authentic' was a limitation, and Samoan cast members took up the responsibility to maintain authenticity:

He had some suggestions but [...] he was not sure about some Pacific, we had to clarify with him what he can and can't do. And he would still ask the question why. And it would be something specific about the Pacific. There is a reason you can't do this. (MAV)

Mavaega's emphasis on the boundaries of the directors' role is indicative that practitioners felt that outsiders need to be controlled. While the interaction between members of the production team facilitated cultural exchange, the cast's perception was that most of the time the director had to consult Pasifika people in order to be culturally appropriate and authentic. Some practitioners interviewed described limitations as what the director 'can' and 'cannot' do, based on the idea of cultural authenticity. Practitioners, specifically Tanya Muagututi'a and Mavaega, emphasised the need for cultural authenticity:

Mavaega One of the changes that Robert wanted to make... actually there are a few changes but we didn't want that.

T. Muagututi'a He wanted to cut it... The White Sundays, he cut scenes, made it shorter.

Mavaega Yes, a definite example would be the White Sunday. The costume department would go ahead and put things together without consultation, and we were like 'we don't actually do that'. There was not anything major, but there were differences, and he understood ... but if the Court puts on a play about Pacific people, they can't just go ahead without consultation. (MUA\_T, MAV)

Practitioners took up the roles of the translators and possibly even censor to make sure Pasifika cultural values are represented 'truthfully'. Their role as translators is of significance, because the director, whose cultural knowledge practitioners discredited, also considered himself a translator



between Pasifika and European people. For practitioners, the director's and the company's artistic vision were seen as secondary to the requirement to remain culturally appropriate. The practitioners distinguished between insiders and outsiders based on cultural background and claimed that those in the in-group should have the control to decide what can be presented. The conflict evokes the dilemmas on the right to representation, and to what degree art should be controlled based on culture and authenticity, especially in the light of the acknowledgement that even Pasifika experiences can be radically different from each other.

#### **6.2.5 'Mainstream' and 'fringe'**

Practitioners' definitions of mainstream reflected the subjectivity and temporality of the term, and the definitions ranged from finances, recognition, and to ethnicity. Manusaute specifically explained that companies are dependent on the 'mainstream' or 'credit card audience', described as the regular theatregoers (European and middle class). According to Manusaute the mainstream audience means more financial gain, and thus becoming part of the mainstream is advantageous. Riley saw the primary characteristic of being part of the mainstream as money: 'I definitely want to get to a stage where my stuff is mainstream. [...] I definitely want to make money' (RIL). Being part of the mainstream is seen in terms of profit by these practitioners. However, practitioners talked about wanting to become part of the mainstream to earn more money, rather than already identifying themselves with being part of it.

For the overwhelming majority of practitioners, however, ethnicity was seen as the major factor that influenced one's belonging to the mainstream. Kightley explained that practitioners encounter more difficulties than mainstream companies: 'we are given a little less license to fail than mainstream theatre and shows' (KIG). Although being Pasifika does not prevent one from becoming part of the mainstream, it is perceived as making it more difficult. Riley's examples of mainstream included European companies: mainstream is what 'ATC puts on and big faces like that'. While Auckland Theatre Company, Downstage, Bats, and Court Theatre all made a commitment to present new New Zealand (including Maori and Pasifika) work, and emphasise that 'there is a lot more work and opportunities for Pasifika theatre companies now to be performed [at Downstage]', the mainstream is nevertheless considered European by practitioners (BEA).

The only practitioner who emphasised that ethnicity was not important was Avia, who first disregarded the influence of ethnicity: 'You can be Chinese or Indian or Maori or Samoan and also be part of the mainstream' (AVI). Based on this definition, she described her position as an artist who belongs to the mainstream based on merit: 'I'm not just PI in a group with other Pacific people. I know I can be put in with the rest of them. I know that my name is going to be in the list with other

mainstream poets and performers' (AVI). However, Avia contradicted her previous statements about disregarding ethnicity, when she associated mainstream with 'the rest of them', and implied she had the potential to be part of it, but she and other Pasifika practitioners just were not part of the mainstream. Thus, eventually even Avia thought that ethnicity and being part of the mainstream are linked. Being a Pasifika artist had a negative connotation associated with being an ethnic artist and not being 'recognised'. She remembered that there was an ethnic divide and suggested that mainstream overlaps with the dominant European culture. Defining the mainstream is problematic because practitioners saw mainstream both as an objective measure of recognition and as group of artists who are part of the dominant European culture.

Collaborations with European companies were identified as an opportunity to become part of the mainstream. Riley considered working with 'ATC and big faces like that' a step toward becoming mainstream (RIL). Muagututi'a, however, did not see a link between mainstream and collaborations. Reflecting on Pacific Underground's collaboration with Court Theatre, she maintained that the 'mainstream and Pacific Underground don't have much relationship at all' (MUA\_T). Therefore, while the number of collaborations is identified as a growing trend, and as a result Pasifika theatre is more visible to the core audience of Court Theatre, practitioners are not in agreement about the implication of these relationships. Nevertheless, European audience, opportunities to perform in theatres, and funding that accompany collaborations with European companies do imply that collaborations are indeed a move away from Pasifika theatre's marginalised position.

Kightley defined mainstream based on popularity, and considered the mainstream a form of recognition. While he did not consider Pasifika theatre in general mainstream, he and other practitioners regarded The Naked Samoans' work as mainstream, because it was popular. However, the distinction between the company's film and television work and their theatre shows was blurred.

Location was associated with being part of the mainstream. Members of Pacific Underground, a theatre company located in Christchurch, pointed out that they were 'mainstream in Christchurch' but relatively unknown in New Zealand, even though they had been producing theatre for twenty years (MUA\_T). Muagututi'a pointed out that most professional theatre is produced in the centres (like Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, or Dunedin), and there is a big divide between the centres and the rest. Even members of Court Theatre argued that 'Christchurch is quite limited in that respect' (ANO2). The divide was intensified in the case of Pasifika work because most Pasifika people live in Auckland and its surroundings, and most of Pasifika theatre is created and performed there.

Manusaute from the Auckland based company Kila Kokonut Krew, however, added that Pasifika theatre is not mainstream in Auckland either.

Overall, practitioners I interviewed saw audience, finances, and geography as dividing factors; they also pointed out that mainstream implied a European middle class audience, and a central geographical location. Ethnicity was mentioned as a possible dividing factor, and practitioners implied that mainstream and the dominant European culture overlap.

Regardless of their definition of the mainstream, practitioners emphasised that Pasifika theatre was not part of the mainstream. The notable exceptions are Kightley's television work and Victor Rodger's work in theatre.

#### **6.2.6 Move toward a 'mainstream'**

Collaborations with European companies can reposition Pasifika theatre from the fringes of the New Zealand theatre scene. Pasifika theatre was identified as a trend, but Chandra was unsure about its staying power: it is 'an upward trend, but might just be a trend'. The visibility of Pasifika work in the popular media is associated with a move away from the margins. *Bro Town*, *Sione's Wedding*, and *No. 2* all became successful in New Zealand. Kightley reflected on their success:

It's weird because our stuff became "mainstream" and I take that as a sign of success because we're not on the fringe anymore. It's not those PIs and their stories anymore. [...]Because if our stories become mainstream, our communities become mainstream and less marginalised. (KIG)

Kightley considers the popularity of Pasifika film and television a success, both in artistic and social-cultural terms. The visibility of Pasifika practitioners de-marginalises Pasifika theatre and Pasifika communities. The link between the arts and society resonates with Pasifika theatre's social purpose, as discussed in Chapter 5. The shift of Pasifika theatre to mainstream is slower than the move of Pacific television and film: 'it hasn't quite happened in theatre, in that way it's PIs doing PI play, doing their own stuff' (KIG).

The repositioning of Pasifika theatre would mean that Pasifika practitioners do not just 'do their own stuff' anymore; collaboration with mainstream theatre companies and international success are regarded as markers of the transition. Carter also emphasised that collaborations are linked to the audience and 'any work, any Pacific writer as soon as [ATC] presents you, you have been presented in a mainstream company to a mainstream audience' (CAR\_A). Mainstream audience's familiarity with Pasifika theatre makers' work helps reposition theatre. This already happened for some practitioners: 'people want the next Victor Rodger play, he developed an audience' (CAM). Whether it is a realistic possibility, if Pasifika theatre belonged to the mainstream, it would be a big step

towards multiculturalism in New Zealand. It could also significantly increase audience numbers, because even practitioners pointed out, most theatregoers in New Zealand are European.

Development of future audiences through publishing and education also improves the visibility of Pasifika theatre. School tours, as discussed Chapter 5, introduce students to theatre and create role models. The theatre tours serve as an introduction to theatre for students. The number of Pasifika plays published grew in the last fifteen years. Kightley reflected on this development in relation to Pasifika theatre's move toward the mainstream:

It is a move toward it, because our plays are getting published and students are learning them at school. [...] I go out to schools a lot. If a class is staging *Niu Sila* [...] I talk to the class. So I guess theatre, that was produced, been published and made it to the school, is crossing into [mainstream]. Because young non-Pacific Island people study these plays, and learn from that. Maybe it's a move toward [mainstream]. (KIG)

The incorporation of Pasifika plays in the school curriculum is seen as success in itself because plays familiarise students with the plays and Pasifika theatre's history. Students' engagement with the plays in mainstream education is identified as a step toward the mainstream. Unfortunately, there have been only a few Pasifika plays that have made it into the curriculum.

#### **6.2.7 A theatre making machine, limit to artistic freedom**

The mainstream was associated with stereotyping of Pasifika people, which could be limiting for Pasifika theatre companies seeking to empower their audience. Anae argues that *Bro'Town*, one of the only shows that Pasifika theatre practitioners considered mainstream, shows negative stereotypes of Pasifika people. Manusaute added that the mainstream representation of Pasifika people is racist, and asks 'the Pacific Islander cannot be smart in the mainstream, can he?' (MAN). Asking whether there is room for original representation of Pasifika people beyond stereotyped representation echoes Anae's criticism, and asks if his company's work would also have to change.

Practitioners suggested that the mainstream would limit their freedom in creativity, themes, and the production process. It was feared that productions would be heavily controlled by the often seemingly invisible expectations and rules of the European dominated mainstream New Zealand theatre. Manusaute warned against commercialisation of Pasifika theatre and censorship, arguing that style and content would be restricted. The restrictions according to which mainstream operates, are opposite to the purpose of theatre, as Manusaute argued:

The luxury of theatre is that you can become [something different], you can come and experience. If the voice is not ok, you can't control the way we do it. If you go to mainstream you have to have a certain look, a certain product for mainstream. (MAN)

Thus, mainstream theatre pieces are seen as products, something contradicting the stated purpose of Pasifika theatre, namely transformation, social commentary and resistance to the dominant structures. The dominant is associated with financial stability, but the price is to be 'a sell out as an artist' Riley added (RIL). While practitioners considered popularity and visibility in social media positive, the mainstream was associated with the loss of outspokenness, and an inability to provide social commentary. Leilua emphasised that theatre should not only please but also challenge people:

I don't ever want just keep people happy. We always want to challenge people, and in that regard, we don't want to be mainstream. Want to be edgy, about what we do and innovative about what we do. (LEI)

The mainstream is purely for entertainment and therefore social commentary becomes impossible imagined practitioners. Practitioners denied that the voices in the mainstream could be the voice of Pasifika people.

The question 'can Pasifika people be heard?', which echoes Spivak's question 'does the subaltern speak?' unfolded in Leilua's and Manusaute's thoughts on becoming part of the mainstream (Spivak & Morris, 2010). Their denial is supported by Polataiavo, who described the mainstream as 'a mould. This is the way it's been set, it's been set for a long time' (POL). The dominant discourse is seen as all-encompassing and deeply embedded in people's thinking and institutional structures. Polataiavo's conclusion was that the system could not be changed because the invisible censorship of mainstream could affect content and style in such a way that her company's voice would be radically altered. Similarly to Spivak, practitioners concluded that it would not be the voice of Pasifika people 'stuck' on the margins of society (POL).

Pasifika theatre practitioners who work within the mainstream have no influence on the system, argued practitioners. Polataiavo identified successful theatre makers, who she described as generating little change:

For example, you get The Naked Samoans. You get an Oscar Kightley, who runs TV3. Not runs, but he is in there. But nothing happens. Nothing happens, because to a certain degree he must still follow that formula. (POL)

The dominant discourse has a formula that is resistant to change, either from within or from without. Polataiavo expressed concern that the dominant discourse incapacitated those working in it and the insiders lack power. While those inside try to change the system, they and their work are changed, and transformation through their art became impossible. Pacific Underground members, who worked on *Angels*, described a similar experience when they were 'sucked in by the Court Machine' (ANO1).

The mainstream is like a machine, and outsider status is associated with the imagery of independence and freedom. Practitioners' views suggested that they saw themselves not only outside the mainstream, but also outside the discourse of theatre, entertainment, and even ethnicity. An interesting contradiction is that while practitioners celebrated their status as outsiders, even Polataiavo's and Manusaute's company, Kila Kokonut Krew, worked with mainstream companies.

### **Different experiences, different power**

In some cases practitioners can keep their power while working with mainstream companies. Wendt's experiences staging *The Songmaker's Chair* at Auckland Theatre Company contrasts with Vaele's and Tanya Muagututi'a's (Pacific Underground) collaboration on *Angels* with Court Theatre and highlights different power struggles. This was both Wendt's and Pacific Underground's first time working with a professional company, but there were numerous differences that indicate that Wendt's influence was larger than Vaele's and Muagututi'a's. For example, while Wendt's script was unchanged, Vaele's and Muagututi'a's text was cut. Wendt also chose the director, but Court Theatre picked one for *Angels*.

The two theatre environments worked with were also different. Auckland (Auckland Theatre Company) has a large Pasifika population compared to Christchurch (Court Theatre), and Auckland Theatre Company has significantly increased its involvement with Maori and Pasifika work. Christchurch was also a smaller and less diverse city, with a smaller cultural scene than Auckland. Pacific Underground members suggested that there might be substantial differences between Court Theatre and Auckland Theatre Company, based on their experience on Pasifika theatre makers: 'I never worked with the Court, so I don't know how they work either. ATC [Auckland Theatre Company] have a lot of Islanders so I've been around a lot of actors, so they understand' (ANO1).

Wendt started the production with more power than Pacific Underground did. Although this was Wendt's first play, he is one of the most prominent novelists and thinkers in the Pacific region. He chose the director, Nathaniel Lees, who then chose the cast. Lees and Wendt had a common understanding of the play. Pacific Underground members had over fifteen years of experience in theatre, and wrote the script for *Angels*, but the writers had to audition for the roles, had no input in choosing the director or designer,<sup>49</sup> and had little say in changes in the script. Muagututi'a and Vaele

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<sup>49</sup> The director of *The Songmaker's chair* was Nathaniel Lees, one of the most accomplished Pasifika directors and actors from a Samoan background. The Court chose Robert Gilbert, a Pakeha director,

participated in the bargaining as cast members, based on their cultural knowledge rather than as authors.

The two productions are in many regards not comparable, but contrasting the power relations and the authority practitioners revealed that working with professional companies was not a unified experience. Nevertheless, the production of *Angels* may serve as a cautionary tale for companies inexperienced in intercultural collaborations. 'When in Rome' says the saying, and indeed, when creating theatre for a European audience, the primary purpose of companies is to cater for this audience rather than to maintain cultural authenticity. The implication of this analysis is that if future collaborations with European theatre could result in a more superficial and Europeanised representation in Pasifika theatre and Pasifika people. This on the one hand could attract European audience; on the other hand it could foster Pasifika stereotypes.

### 6.3 Conclusions

Is Pasifika theatre like a chameleon or like a reversed chameleon? In some ways the image of the reverse chameleon is fitting. Practitioners want to stand out, and the Pasifika audience is described as radically different from the European audience. Pasifika theatre uses mimicry as subversion, and practitioners reference indigenous performance forms, which distinguishes them from European theatre. Practitioners strengthen this difference by distinguishing their work primarily based on ethnicity. In addition, Pasifika theatre is located on the fringe.

In other ways, Pasifika theatre shows similarities to other New Zealand theatre. Pasifika theatre moved from the fringe toward mainstream theatres and the dominant discourse—maybe it is the nature of the reversed chameleon to be like everyone else, to blend in after all? The use of popular culture and Western theatre conventions also suggest that Pasifika theatre is alike to other theatre in New Zealand. This similarity, however, is connected to using the likeness to draw attention to social inequalities.

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who worked with Maori and Pasifika performers in the 1980s, running the Whakarite Theatre Company, it was his first main bill directing as well.

## Chapter 7: Changing frames: migration, upbringing, and languages

They sailed on the Mātua of banana boat fame  
With their handsome heirs Nofo and Mau the Sane,  
In search of the Pālagi cargo of education and pay  
And the gold in the streets of Freemantle Bay.  
And what did they find in that frame?

(Wendt, 2004, p. 82)

And what did first-generation migrants find in that frame? ask Lilo and Frank in *The Songmaker's Chair*. This was the question with which practitioners and plays were concerned in the first decades of Pasifika theatre. Later, Pasifika theatre's stories moved from migration to more contemporary issues, and started to discuss loss of culture and heritage. The population has acculturated more into New Zealand culture and at the same time, there is a growing awareness of loss. But even today, Pasifika theatre practitioners' primary reference is migration. I also propose that Pasifika theatre moved away from immigration as the master narrative, yet Pasifika theatre practitioners are still frustrated by ruptures of migration and the perceived lack of change in the socio-economic position of Pasifika communities. There are numerous differences between second and third-generation practitioners that range from their upbringing to their degree of acculturation. Practitioners also set themselves apart from the rest of the population by strongly identifying themselves as theatre makers. In addition, I discuss the role Pasifika languages play in Pasifika Theatre.

### 7.1 Identities

#### 7.1.1 Second-generation perspectives

New Zealand is the land of milk and honey.  
Plenty jobs.  
Plenty women.  
Plenty good times.  
Good education for the kids.  
Don't need visa.  
No problem just get your airfare!  
(Fuemana, 2008, p. 68)

Second-generation practitioners comprise the majority of Pasifika theatre practitioners, and while their time in theatre has not come to an end, they were critical of themselves as well as the next



generation of practitioners. Second-generation practitioners explained that they already told the stories of first and second-generation Pasifika people, who migrated for 'plenty job' and 'good education for the kids' (ibid). They argued that that migrant identities and dreams were prominent in early Pasifika theatre, and used the expressions 'the migrant dream' and 'looking for the land of milk and honey' to describe their parents' reasons for migration (KIG; MAN; IFO). The migrant dream for Pacific people was to gain better socio-economical position in New Zealand for themselves and their offspring. As a result, first-generation parents had high expectations for their children and expected them to become 'doctors and lawyers' (ANO1; KIG; MAI).

First-generation migrants' hardship was portrayed vividly in the work and personal stories of Pasifika theatre practitioners, who were born in New Zealand or migrated at a young age (MUA\_T; KIG; MAI). Plays in the first decades of Pasifika theatre, including *Fresh off the Boat*, and *The Songmaker's Chair*, were concerned with the question of positioning and migration to New Zealand, as Manusaute described: 'who we are in New Zealand? [...] why and how did we come here?' (MAN). While early plays drew attention to the disillusionment of early migrants, they also expressed a romanticised purpose of migration: their parents' move to New Zealand was associated with the aim to create a better future for their children (KIG; MUA\_T).

Second-generation practitioner's concept of Pasifika history consisted of their parents' stories about migration and life in the Pacific Islands. This history was often idealised, a fact highlighted by Pasifika plays. In *Frangipani perfume* Pomu, who has never left New Zealand, explains her vision of Samoa to her sisters:

It's not cold like here. The median average is 27 degrees... that means, the winter is like our hottest summer. Dad says at night, there are millions of stars and you can see them clearly, pulsating light that could be thousands of years old.

(Urale & Fuemana, 2004, p. 6)

Pomu imagines Samoa as an idealised far away paradise, and her irritated sisters, who have been to Samoa, got tired of explaining to her that Samoa is nothing like that. Pomu's only connection to her history is this image of Samoa. Pomu, like many second-generation Pasifika, learned stories of Samoa from parents, for whom such stories are stories of loss. First-generation migrants' stories are often idealised and they equally reflect migrants' longing for the lost Islands and their disappointment with life in New Zealand. Like the previous generation, second-generation practitioners use images of the Pacific Islands to reflect on Pasifika people's lives in New Zealand. Manusaute, after coming back from Samoa to New Zealand, described Samoa in an idealised way:

Fuck [sic], what did we come here [to New Zealand] for? When I went back home [Samoa], it's like man, why did we left this place. This [New Zealand] is a harder place for my people.

There are so many rules there is so many laws to live by. We are not the king of our jungle here, because there is another king, we just try to fit in, mould in. And most of our people fail. (MAN)

The image of Samoa is compared to New Zealand, and 'what did we come here for' is a criticism of Pasifika people's socioeconomic conditions, rather than a praise of Samoa. Thus, second-generation practitioners used the Pacific Islands and pre-migration history to contrast them with the present. The function of the Pacific Islands in history as a mythic homeland was secondary to their purpose to emphasise hardship in New Zealand.

Plays and practitioners' comments evoke images of an idealised collectivist Pacific society partly to criticise New Zealand society. Nawalowalo, whose play *Vula* followed the natural and organic rhythm of Fijian time, explained that in Fiji, women's lives revolve around the sea. Women fish, wash and gossip near the sea. Pomu in *Frangipani Perfume* imagined a Pacific paradise, and Charles, the recent migrant in *Fresh off the Boat*, wished he had never left Samoa. Manusaute yearned for the safety that comes from a sense of community and extended family:

We are the children of the taro plantations; we had all our families there. My family left our taro plantation when I was 9, put me on a plane and brought me here. Thirty years later I'm still asking questions...When I went back home, [I thought to myself] man, why did we leave this place? (MAN)

Such longing for the lost paradise, whether real or imagined, is linked to the present. The question 'why did we leave this place?' criticises life in New Zealand rather than migration. The above-mentioned plays, questioning the benefit of migration, tacitly work as criticisms of New Zealand society, characterised as it is by broken communities and lack of support networks. Migration thus broke the imagined harmony of the Pacific Islands. Plays about first-generation Pasifika, such as *Fresh off the Boat* and *Frangipani perfume*, are about finding one's place in a new culture, searching for a new support network, and trying to continue life as it used to be in the Pacific. Thus longing for the lost Pacific was to a real degree synonymous with yearning for large collectivist communities.

Idealised images of the Pacific Islands suggest that Pasifika theatre practitioners are disillusioned with New Zealand, and feel like outsiders in New Zealand society; as Manusaute put it, they are not the 'kings' of the kiwi jungle (MAN). Outsider status is combined with a feeling that Pasifika people lack authority and control in New Zealand, because they are unable to generate social change. Lees pointed out that in the late seventies Pasifika people's position had not changed since he was a child, and Kightley and Manusaute both characterised social change as slower than expected for Pasifika populations. In Pasifika plays, characters often work blue-collar jobs, in factories (*The Factory*), as cleaners (*Frangipani Perfume*), or in supermarkets (*Once were Samoans*). New Zealand was no longer perceived as the land of milk and honey, but as a land of unfulfilled promises. Plays

such as *Fresh off the Boat*, *The Factory*, and *Frangipani Perfume* expressed disappointment with apparent lack of change. Practitioners I interviewed argued that it was especially visible from them, as artists:

Nah, nothing has changed. I've been here for 30 years still it's the same. We still have to struggle. [...] When I think I am an artist my eyes kind of open to what society has to offer. [...] Problems left, right and centre. You know, like what has changed? It is the same government, the same thing. (MAN)

Pasifika people's hardship is partly attributed to consecutive governments' ineffectiveness and failed acculturation attempts. Manusaute was adamant that his experiences can be described in the last thirty years as the same ineffective government and same social issues, , and emerging playwrights expressed a similar opinion. Smith's play, *Music and Me*, portrayed the hardship of today's generation through the themes of poverty, drug abuse, prostitution, and illness. Practitioners including Manusaute, Michelle Muagututi'a, Kightley, and Maiava emphasised that social issues reappear in Pasifika plays because Pasifika people's position in New Zealand is upsetting to practitioners. New Zealand was described as a society where Pasifika people do not 'fit', but they attempted to acculturate to gain more influence and become insiders. It is, again, an image of a reverse chameleon, because practitioners want to fit in in the kiwi jungle, but they have not yet acculturated (or are unable to acculturate) and thus stand out.

Second-generation practitioners also described themselves as outsiders in Samoa. Thus, second-generation practitioners do not fit anywhere – they are outsiders in New Zealand and outsiders in Samoa. One participant returned to Samoa on several occasions, and noted that she felt more comfortable living in a holiday resort, than in her ancestors' village. In Samoa, she felt like an outsider because of the gap between her urbanised lifestyle in New Zealand and life in the village in Samoa (ANO1). A similar experience is explained in *The Songmaker's Chair*, when one of the sons, Fa'amau, who went to boarding school in New Zealand, opens up to his mother years after he spent a few years in Samoa:

Fa'amau: You remember the three years Joan and I spent teaching in Samoan?

She [Malaga, the mother] nods.

Fa'amau: I hated most of it.

She looks shocked and hurt.

Fa'amau: I couldn't wait to get out and come home. I was the one who wanted to leave. Not Joan...She didn't go there with the romantic baggage you raised us on.

(Wendt, 2004, p. 52)

Fa'amau, like the second-generation Samoan practitioners interviewed, learned about Samoa through his parents, and was disappointed to realise that their memories were idealised and had

little in common with reality. Thus, second-generation practitioners described themselves as double-outsiders: they do not quite fit in New Zealand and they do not belong to the Pacific Islands either.

Second-generation practitioners' group was transitional, because migration was not a choice they themselves had made, but still they felt that they did not fully acculturate to New Zealand society either. Many of their stories<sup>50</sup> were about searching for one's cultural identity and about fitting in in New Zealand. However, Kightley argued, Pasifika theatre needed to stay relevant: 'and that is why I want to see new stories. I don't want to see a story about a daughter who wants to be a dancer, but her mom wants her to be a doctor. We already told those stories'(KIG). Kightley saw career choices as a typically second-generation problem and he called for 'new stories'. Second-generation practitioners unanimously argued that young practitioners should move on and renew Pasifika theatre. Thus, because Pasifika theatre is young, practitioners are able to see clear trends, and influence the development of the theatre movement. Second-generation practitioners wanted younger practitioners to move away from migration stories. In the context of their emphasis on shift from migration stories it became clear that these practitioners see the development of Pasifika theatre as parallel to Pasifika people's history in New Zealand. Thus, in this regard, Pasifika theatre is a continuation of storytelling traditions in the Pacific, because one of their primary functions is regarded as passing on history. Kightley's call for new stories reinforced Pasifika theatre's educational purpose:

Our theatre has to be, our culture, storytelling a living thing, the kid have to be telling these stories, different than the stories we told. I would not want to go to the theatre today and see the same stories we told because I would have hoped that we moved on from there. (KIG)

Therefore, while Kightley wanted theatre to mirror current experiences of Pasifika theatre, he also emphasised that Pasifika theatre's function is storytelling. Through this function, Pasifika theatre gains an educational purpose, which practitioners' statements about younger generations' ignorance of Pasifika history magnify into a serious social problem. As Pasifika history is only marginally incorporated in the New Zealand school curriculum, future generations lack of knowledge could result in further loss of Pasifika identity. At the same time, if future plays do not write about Pasifika history, Pasifika theatre could become a mirror or catalogue of history, and as plays are rarely performed again, it could lose its educational function.

Today, Pasifika theatre is in an in-between stage, where second-generation practitioner's stories have been told, and third-generation Pasifika theatre practitioners are not yet heard. From their

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<sup>50</sup> Such as: Fresh off the Boat, Le Matau, Horizons, The Frigate bird sings, Dawn Raids, Niu Sila, Once were Samoans, The Songmaker's chair, No.2 etc.

own experiences, second-generation practitioners emphasised that beginner playwrights use theatre therapy and often write about immediate themes that the writers themselves need to process. Such discussion of the immediate is a forum for social issues, and serves therapeutic purposes for the writer:

When you are a writer, you tend to start with things that affect you the most, and write all that stuff down and it's all the worst things that can happen and people do that. [...] Then they pass all that and the craft takes over. Then you start inventing stories, making things up, writing beautifully. [...] But it might have been something that was tackled a few other times, we managed to get out, create a new piece but the same sort of stories. (MAI)

What affects young practitioners the most are often social issues; therefore plays by emerging practitioners in the 1980s and 1990s often rebelled against social conventions, criticise Pasifika culture, social hierarchies and conventions, and the church. The early years of Pasifika theatre were dominated by immediate topics second-generation practitioners wrote about; and as practitioners started out at the same time, a large proportion of works discussed social issues:

A lot of Pacific theatre was about quite heavy issues, topical, about migration, identity rites of passage, and elements of culture. They were quite furious, they were quite dark. [...] Not about what the audience wants to hear, but "this is what we're thinking and we are going to tell you". Nowadays we [have] [...] moved on just from having to tell the struggles and the issues. [...] We can talk about everyday issues. We're not pigeon holed as, you know, heavy drama. (CAR\_A)

In the early years of Pasifika theatre plays were about 'heavy issues' and 'were quite dark', because second-generation practitioners used theatre for therapy rather than to entertain the audience. However, as Maiava described, these practitioners then matured and moved away from these issues, which is a natural learning curve for writers. While second-generation practitioners no longer use theatre primarily for therapeutic purposes and as a result Pasifika theatre is not 'pigeon holed as heavy drama', these, now experienced, second-generation practitioners identify with emerging writers who are going through the same developmental phase early practitioners experienced when they started out. Second-generation practitioners were proud that Pasifika theatre was not stereotyped as 'all serious', and did not fall in the same trap as Maori theatre, which is already stereotyped as political, focused on the Treaty and the land (CAR\_A). Yet another way to express Pasifika theatre's outsider status of the bicultural framework, is practitioners' argument that the Maori have the right to talk about 'heavy issues', because they are the indigenous population, and suffered injustices during the last two hundred years. Pasifika theatre may offer a unique opportunity to observe a theatre movement development from generation to generation, because due to the unique historical circumstances practitioners start out roughly at the same time. Nevertheless, while second-generation practitioners expect another dark stage of Pasifika theatre,

whether Pasifika theatre will go through another therapeutic phase may be too early to tell, as many of third-generation practitioners started to develop only in the last couple of years.

There was also a quantitative change in the number of active practitioners: while at the turn of the millennium there were fewer emerging new practitioners than in the 1990s, by the mid-2000s the number of practitioners and comedy troupes grew. Second-generation practitioner's main concern was the quality rather than the quantity of work, but the increase in emerging practitioners is nevertheless seen as important for the development of Pasifika theatre:

Bruce Lee said: running water never gets stale. You have to keep the water running and that requires fresh blood, but yeah there hasn't been much lately, there has been pockets coming out, it's good to see and people are sort of doing stuff. (KIG)

Kightley was pleased by the influx of 'fresh blood', and noted that there were more and more new playwrights. The upward trend was partially a result of education, and of training schemes like Banana Boat and Young Kila Playwrights.

A fundamental difference between second and third-generation practitioners is their upbringing. Second-generation practitioners described themselves as pioneers who 'fearlessly' took initiative and established Pasifika theatre (KIG). But what made this generation special? Second-generation practitioners I interviewed unanimously argued that the quality of their work effected their reputation, as Muagututi'a argued: 'we have a strong reputation among Pacific communities, and it needs to be upheld'(MUA\_T). Pasifika theatre practitioners were taught the importance of reputation and performing well from their early childhood. Muagututi'a remembered that in her childhood, her performance in school and church influenced her parents' social standing in the community. These pressures intensified in Sunday School and on White Sunday, where children performed biblical stories, plays, poems, song, and dances. Muagututi'a remembered:

There was a huge pressure to be brilliant, in the community. My bro used to cry all the time – that is what I remember. And the parent pressure: "make sure your kids do well", because parents want to be the best. It's your name in the community. (MUA\_T)

The reputation of first-generation Pasifika parents depended on their children's performance at these occasions, and therefore children learned that they had to perform well from an early age. Such pressures were not mentioned by third-generation practitioners, and it is likely that the second-generation was under larger pressure because Pasifika communities were in a stage of being reconstructed. Migrants arrived from close-knit communities in the Pacific Islands to New Zealand; and in the new environment communities shrunk and changed. New migrant communities in New Zealand were very close-knit, and they were built based on family, locality, ethnicity, and the church. The church became a meeting place for new migrants, a place of community building, and identity

construction. Social hierarchies in new communities were based on a combination of traditional and new concepts, and the church became a site where new hierarchies were established and strengthened. Children's performances were sites of comparison, therefore second-generation practitioners were expected to become successful and make good career choices. Public donations, where ministers would read out how much money each family had given to the church were common, and they further increased competition. Maiava and other practitioners I interviewed pointed out that donating beyond one's budget, along with the consequent detrimental effects for one's family, became frequent among Pasifika people. On a larger scale, first-generation Pasifika wanted their children to succeed and fit in in New Zealand, which second-generation practitioners often internalised as an obligation; after all their parents left 'paradise' for them. This served as a strong motive to represent one's parents, heritage and community. Kightley's story of his parents' generation portrays the perceived responsibility to perform well:

It was hard for our parents sometimes, but then they see you in the paper and TV, and they are proud of you. And they see what you are, and they see that what you are doing is not just mucking around. [...] I thought it would be hard with the older generations, but they were the most supportive [...], they were encouraging, and because they really wanted to see young Pacific Island people out there and they were proud of us a little bit. Because their generations weren't allowed to be so out, and confident about their PI-ness. (KIG)

Through doing their best, second-generation practitioners did not only respond to their parents' request to do well and maintain the family's reputation, but also participated in the post-colonial self-determination project that made Pasifika culture visible. By re-building hierarchies on a larger level, they promoted Pasifika identity and pride. Their efforts' to make Pasifika people visible through Pasifika theatre elicited support, as Pasifika people saw it as an opportunity to get a step closer to finding their place in New Zealand society.

By the time third-generation practitioners were born, social hierarchies in the new communities had solidified. In addition, their parents were less supportive of traditional values from the Pacific Islands than previous generations because the parents spent most of their lives in New Zealand. Both second and third-generation practitioners noted, in agreement with the above argument, that third-generation migrants were different, more settled and less 'fearless' (KIG). Even some third-generation practitioners such as Schmidt argued that her generation had different values:

I would say that over the last decade my generation has kind of died out, have become very pampered and mediocre. I can't really go into depth but that's how I see this generation. Somewhat way too laid back. You might call it lazy, but that's how I see it. But that's just me. (SCH)

Schmidt described her generation as more settled as if its fire had died out. Her reflection reveals that third-generation Pasifika are less characterised by a can-do attitude and the perfectionism

second-generation practitioners took pride in. In agreement with Schmidt, theatre professionals described this new generation as more reliant on help, and lacking in initiative (WAL, ANO3).

Second-generation practitioners speculated about the future of Pasifika theatre. They emphasised that new stories should reflect - changes in identity and social circumstances. Practitioners expressed their disappointment with lack of social change which results in reoccurrence of themes in Pasifika plays. Most importantly, second-generation practitioners argued that the next generation of practitioners should make Pasifika theatre more diverse.

#### **7.1.2 Emerging practitioners' stories**

Third-generation practitioners' sense of history is radically different from second-generation practitioners' views on Pasifika history. Emerging Pasifika theatre practitioners write about more contemporary stories rather than about first-generation migration stories. This shift in 'history' became evident in the last decade of Pasifika theatre, where migration stories only emerge in second-generation practitioners work. Victoria Schmidt, whose first play debuted in 2012, explained that migration stories are less relevant for her generation:

As much as I respect migration stories, I write about how far we've come from that era. Migration stories are a big part of Pacific theatre, however, I really believe I'm different in the way that I write and what I see. I like to write about [...] our people that didn't make the dream of the milk and honey. You come to South Auckland and you see the generation of the migration era, and a few of them didn't make it. Some are begging outside for coins next to Lil Abners in Papatoetoe, some are selling themselves behind a club in Manurewa, selling drugs, locked up in jail. (SCH)

Pasifika people have come far from the lived experiences of migration and its immediate aftermath, explained Schmidt, yet the milk and honey dream is inscribed in the stories of emerging practitioners. A long-term effect of migration, described as the loss of hope, and bitter disappointment with the 'milk and honey dream' are frequent narratives in contemporary Pasifika plays. Yet, for emerging practitioners, migration is reduced to the starting point of a contemporary narrative through which Pasifika people's disillusionment with life in New Zealand can be expressed. In fact, stories of the Pacific Islands are largely absent from this generation's sense of history. In effect, for third-generation practitioners migration became the start of Pasifika history. The implication of this analysis is that Pasifika history only goes back two generations for these practitioners, and what was before is not mentioned:

Immigration is my grandparents' story. I do not really have the right to it, because it is not my story. I still enjoy hearing about that experience. It was my grandparents who came from the Islands, and their migration story is always interesting for me. But for us it's more so about who were here now in our community, what's it like in South Auckland, what is a



day like in South Auckland. It is not an immigration story, but surviving paying the bills, family and kids – that’s our world now and that’s the story we tell. (LEI)

The history of Pasifika people in South Auckland started with migration, and third-generation practitioners explained that they have little interest or knowledge of what was before. Thus it is a valid assumption that the rupture caused by migration reduced Pasifika people’s sense of history by breaking it off from centuries of history in the Pacific Islands generation by generation.

Carter pointed out that third-generation practitioners often come from a multiethnic background. Consequently they felt that Pasifika theatre should express their multiethnic background and Carter exclaimed: ‘why can’t you have a Fijian Cook Island theatre experience?’ (CAR\_A). At the same time, Chandra argued that third-generation practitioners ‘assimilated into the Western traditions and have some loss of Pacific identity’, which Pasifika theatre would reflect. Evolving trends in Pasifika theatre, such as the growing importance of identification with one’s specific background and gender identity suggest that second-generation practitioners speculation may be true, but these trends are still young and therefore no conclusions can be drawn yet. Nevertheless, these trends suggest a seemingly paradoxical development: while practitioners acculturated more into New Zealand, they also started to be more interested in their specific cultural background and identity. The development, however, is not paradoxical if one sees it as a growing importance of individualism: the more third-generation Pasifika are acculturated, the more they take on individualistic perspectives of New Zealand society, and as a result, their focus shifts towards their own specific and individual cultural heritage and identity.

Third-generation migrants described an acute sense of double identity, which was created by moving between two worlds:

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| Aumua | Because we are torn between two cultures: at home traditional Pacific Islander, outside is the outside world.   |
| Fulop | What do you mean by traditional?  |
| Aumua | Traditional is our Samoan world, culture, how things are done traditionally, church, respect our elders, use of Samoan language, certain mannerism, how we carry ourselves in public. (AUM) |

Samoan traditions are still alive in Samoan communities but third-generation practitioners also participate in the outside world, through schooling, university, sports, and friends. Unlike second-generation practitioners, they do not consider their ability to move between European and Pasifika cultures as a skill, but as a given. Such change from one generation to the other is a sign of ever growing acculturation of Pasifika people. Nevertheless, they remain reverse chameleons, because even though young Pasifika theatre makers live in a space between two cultures and identities, they

feel they stand out in both. They stand out in New Zealand because they are Pasifika and in their families because they are more acculturated than previous generations.

### **7.1.3 Keep, throw away, or repackage?**

The interview with Manusaute, a second-generation practitioner who works with second and third generation practitioners and tries to cater for third-generation Pasifika audiences, illustrates the complexities of Pasifika theatre's current transitional stage. In the same interview, he expressed three contradicting views on whether migration and identity stories were relevant. The importance of these views lies in the way they contradict each other, a contradiction which shows how recent the third-generations' presence in Pasifika theatre is. Manusaute first said that migration stories should be thrown away, then argued that they should be kept but told differently, and finally he argued that in fact, they should be simply kept. Manusaute first pointed out that migration stories bear no relevance to contemporary audience or theatre makers.

Dawn raids, we've gone beyond that. In second-generation migration stories, we don't tell stories of 'who we are' and identity any more. We know who we are. Our audience knows the recycled stories of Dawn Raids. This 'who I am', sorry, we cannot do that. We are killing ourselves financially, creatively. (MAN)

Thus, the history of Pasifika migration belongs to the history of Pasifika theatre, and should not be repeated. *Dawn Raids* bears only historical relevance to Kila Kokonut Krew's audience, who, according to Manusaute, have already come to terms with migration and its aftermath. The majority of second-generation practitioners argued that migration stories have been exhaustively explored in Pasifika theatre. In addition, Manusaute argued that third-generation Pasifika people reached an understanding of their identity. However, Lees and Maiava emphasised that because Pasifika people's socioeconomic conditions are unchanging, migration's aftermath and Pasifika identities are still important. Manusaute's statement may be audience specific, as Kila Kokonut Krew's Pasifika audience is not comprised of first-wave Pasifika migrants. His interpretation, however, is in contrast with the emerging artists' reflections on living in two cultures and shifting identities, discussed in the previous section.

Manusaute, then, expressed a different, seemingly contradicting view, and argued that migration stories are still important: 'It's a new type of audience same stories, same theme, love whatever but new generation. So mainly, it's repackaging the stories, few more colours and then send it out to the audience' (MAN). He emphasised that stories have similar content, such as migration and identities, but they are told in a different style.

Thirdly, Manusaute articulated a third direction and argued that what really matters is to reiterate migration stories, with or without style changes. Manusaute identified migration stories as survival

stories that must be shared so that Pasifika identities can continue in New Zealand: 'it's important for me, to pass survival, to tell these stories. No one else is going to tell these stories that we tell, these migration stories, South Pacific stories' (MAN). He referred to migration stories as stories of survival which need to be told to express suffering and victory of Pasifika people.

Manusaute's three arguments exemplify the insecurity of the current transition stage of Pasifika theatre. While it is still dominated by second-generation theatre makers, for whom migration is important, the proportion of third-generation audience members is growing. However, as mentioned before exactly because the emergence of the third-generation is so recent, Manusaute is unsure what migration and identity means for this generation, and how to connect with them through theatre.

#### **7.1.4 Theatre maker as an identity**

Pasifika theatre practitioners emphasised that theatre makers is important for them. This is not surprising, because as previously discussed, their role model status is important for them and they all knew each other. In fact, that they know each other is an understatement, as a journal entry shows:

I am at ArtSpeak, the Pasifika theatre fono, and there are artists from TV, theatre, and even fashion. While setting up the fono, I got to know quite a few people, it seems like everyone knows everyone. Most people collaborated, went to the same school. Maiala said, and a lot of them are even family [...] [the evening drinks] did not seem too "click-y" either, everyone knew everyone and gave each other big hugs.[...] they explained [Avia and Tanya Muagtututi'a] that it was a onetime get together, and they especially liked it, because they did not feel alone' (Journal entry, 2010 June 26<sup>th</sup>)

Practitioners have extensive networks and form a community; they are often friends, schoolmates, family members. However, Tanya Muagtututi'a and Carter explained that this community was stronger for Auckland based practitioners, and Christchurch was quite isolated. Practitioners also pointed out that formal events like ArtSpeak are rare, and thus practitioners outside Auckland can feel isolated. Thus, while Pasifika theatre is small community, practitioners outside Auckland often struggle to find connections and an audience, which could lead to the disappearance of non-Auckland theatre troupes. As a result, Pasifika people outside Auckland, who are already often the minority in their towns, could become more isolated and their only opportunity to reinforce their Pasifika identities through theatre would be limited to touring productions.

Pasifika theatre companies, such as Kila Kokonut Krew, Pacific Underground, and Statement Theatre, had a strong connection to their location. Kila Kokonut Krew's purpose was to 'serve communities in South Auckland' and Lees argued that lack of change in South Auckland inspired Statement Theatre's plays. South Auckland has a high Pasifika and Maori population, and is regarded as the home

community of several practitioners. As a result, a significant number of plays by Kila Kokonut Krew, *Music and Me*, and Aumua's work, focused on South Auckland communities. Pacific Underground was based<sup>51</sup> in Christchurch, a monocultural town with a relatively small Pasifika population. Pacific Underground's strong identification with Christchurch and its Pasifika community was combined with a sense of accomplishment to establish and run a theatre company in what is considered a Pasifika void.

Relationships were also important for theatre maker identities. Relationships determined the founding and continuation of companies, such as Kila Kokonut Krew and Pacific Underground. Ifopo remembered that in the early years of Pacific Underground, members of the company helped each other, and Pacific Underground members described the foundation of the company as based on friendships. Ifopo argued that their similar cultural background fostered understanding and collaboration. Pasifika theatre practitioners emphasised that cultural similarities made their early collaborations 'natural', and were important for establishing their companies. Pan-ethnic identification was thus instrumental from the early years of Pasifika theatre. Friendships were important after the companies were established, because familiarity made their working process more efficient, as Mavaega explained: 'because the core members are used to each other' (MAV). Friendships also provided support, and Leilua pointed out that it was the relationships and working environment that kept theatre making positive. Thus friendships between theatre makers fostered a sense of community. Nevertheless, the relationships that practitioners mentioned were limited to Pasifika practitioners, and thus Pasifika practitioners separated themselves not only from the general European population, but also from European theatre makers.

Friendships with theatre makers were contrasted with relationships with non-theatre makers. Differences between outsiders, who were not familiar with production and acting, and theatre makers further strengthened theatre maker identities. Polataiavo gave an example:

But not the normal person – I have to explain so much, from the beginning, like God created the Earth, kind of say it like bring it into the front. [...] there was a scene in there, a heated scene, a sex scene but not as you know it, but it had to come to life on stage so there was lot of kissing and groping. My friend came to see it, and one of my mates and we had a coffee afterward that night and she just couldn't understand it, asking how do you do that and go home to your partner after that happened. And you kind of have to sit there justify, because for them it's like borderline cheating. Because it your personal space and you are allowing that but its work, but it's not work as they know it but as we know. (POL)

Polataiavo does not feel conflicted by kissing someone on stage, which her non-actor friends do not understand. She even has to justify and defend herself to make it clear that it is not cheating.

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<sup>51</sup> After the 2011 Earthquakes in Christchurch, several members of the company moved to Auckland.

Practitioners and non-theatre makers have different attitudes and background knowledge to acting, and these differences serve as a boundary between theatre makers and those who do not belong to theatre, which strengthens practitioners' identification as theatre makers. Some practitioners internalised the expectations of the 'Others' who are not involved in theatre production, and emphasised that there are conflicts between their upbringing and their professional values. A participant explained that nudity on stage is often problematic for actors, because the community does not accept it. In addition, even actors internalise conservative values that prevent them from appearing nude on stage. Heka added that theatre makers who criticise values of the community in their work are often excluded from their community. However, Maiava described the conflict as a top down process through the previously discussed example of casting. He argued that due to politicisation of ethnicity, by the late 1990s it was unacceptable for Pasifika actors to play Maori roles. Actors, however, had no problem with playing a different ethnicity, as he described: 'actors act' (MAI). Thus it was the increasing institutional political correctness that influences audience members and directors to believe that Maori roles should only be played by Maori. Such limitations made practitioners acutely aware of their difference from those who are not involved in theatre production.

While Pasifika theatre makers were proud of their work, they admitted that one of its main limitations was that theatre rarely provided a steady income. The more difficult practitioners perceived theatre work, the more frequent their expressions of 'theatre maker' identities were. Leilua explained that even though she had worked for a professional theatre company since 2003, it was necessary to pick up daytime jobs: 'the crappy jobs you do during the day, it's all about paying the bills and live' (LEI). Nevertheless, she considered her 'real work' theatre: 'when it comes to the real work, theatre, I give it 100%; otherwise I would be thinking why I am doing it. It's my life and passion; if I wouldn't love it I wouldn't be doing it (LEI)'. She rationalised why she kept making theatre and argued that unless it remained a priority, it was not worth continuing. Kightley also emphasised the difficulties of theatre work, and similarly to Leilua, was committed to theatre: 'there is nothing like theatre – that it's my favourite thing, but TV pays for sneakers. It is a bit of a struggle, you have to eat and you end up learning to diversify your talent so you can keep working' (KIG). The theatre maker identity was rationalised: theatre work's description as 'passion' and 'priority' were mentioned parallel with financial difficulties, and therefore practitioners felt the need to justify continuing with the trade.

### 7.1.5 Invisible issues?

Based on the plays and the identified trend in literature, I expected that family, gender, and questioning of culture would feature significantly in the interviews, but practitioners I interviewed barely mentioned these issues. Family was only mentioned a few times, and then in the context of the parents' generation, social exclusion, and once for support. Gender came up strongly only in one interview when discussing a play about women. While practitioners often drew attention to either the lack of female playwrights or emerging female practitioners, they did not elaborate on plays or their importance in detail. The two themes were mentioned superficially in most interviews, but never discussed, which may indicate that gender is an issue practitioners felt compelled to acknowledge, but one they did not feel strongly enough about to elaborate on. On the other hand, the themes may be of import so obviously, that practitioners did not feel the need to further elaborate on the topics.

Most practitioners argued that they wanted to challenge social issues in theatre, and I expected that practitioners want to challenge Pasifika or New Zealand cultures as well. However, criticism of Pasifika culture was only mentioned in one interview, when Polataiavo described her third year drama school solo. The play was about a geisha who fell in love with a man who turned out to be her brother. In the end of the story, they both committed suicide because culture prohibited their being together. Polataiavo explained: 'it was about being bound and bound by tradition and wanting to break free' (POL). Although the main character was a geisha, Polataiavo identified the story as 'a story of my own, about myself' (POL). Through the play she questioned Samoan culture and culture in general:

When I started speculating and kind of really looking at it, I was looking at my writing and it was not so much about the love and the story, but about always questioning Samoan life and culture and why some rules, why it is the way it is. But coming to the conclusion that is just the way it is. (POL)

In her conclusion, she emphasised that even though one's upbringing is important, new scripts and behaviours can be acquired. Modesty and humility, Polataiavo pointed out, 'comes first in Samoan culture. You are never ever first in line, you must always be last'. Nevertheless, in a competitive environment, her views and behaviour changed gradually. She remembered the lack of encouragement in her childhood:

Because as an Islander, I was never told that, never told that I can show off, no "go do it", "you can do it". I was never taught that, was never allowed to do that. Even though inside I felt that I can do it. But it was never the case, it was always "no you sit down, you can be last". It's just the way, the Fa'Samoa, just the way it is. (POL)

While she emphasised that she overcame her cultural limitations and adapted to New Zealand culture, she still used the slightly negative term 'show off'. Thus, while she did change, the negative views on prioritising herself prevailed, a sign of the staying power of upbringing. In the end, she learned to work in both cultures and to choose between different behaviour: 'I never regret for a moment how I was brought up, that I have been brought up the way I have, because I find the middle ground in that' (POL). Considering this was the only example in the interviews for actively questioning Pasifika culture, it was not a direct confrontation: Polataiavo wrote about Japan and in the end she accepted Samoan culture as it was. The absence of references and non-direct questioning could mean that practitioners focused on questioning their culture through raising social issues, such as church and parenting rather than taking a more holistic approach questioning culture as whole like Polataiavo tried.

### **7.1.6 Conclusions on Identities**

The scholarly literature, to the extent that Pasifika theatre is discussed at all, labels Pasifika theatre as post-colonial. This study, however, proposes that such a characterisation is a gross simplification. Practitioners' primary identification was 'migrants' and they positioned both Pasifika people and Pasifika theatre outside of the bicultural framework of New Zealand society. While migration cannot be separated from the post-colonial experience, in the case of Pasifika theatre migration and being a minority are narratives that are equally if not more important than the effects of colonialism. Rather than simply branding it as post-colonial, the reality of Pasifika theatre practice is more accurately thought of as tripartite: post-colonial strands are fleshed out by ethnic and minority perspectives. Pasifika theatre practitioners borrow elements from the dominant European culture, and adapt them to their own need as they draw attention to injustices and power imbalances.

## **7.2 Pacific languages and works of the Western Canon**

Well, she didn't quite say it like that, she said it in Niuean.

I must of [sic] been able to speak my Niue language at some pointed.

I must ask her next time we speak

(Urale & Fuemana, 2004, p. 42)

Language choice is named in research as a post-colonial dilemma; incorporating indigenous languages is a sign of resistance, and English allows a wider audience to be reached. There is a growing trend in Pasifika theatre to use Pacific languages, but the majority of the plays are still in English. Nevertheless, Pasifika theatre practitioners consider Pacific languages important and language is associated with revival of Pacific cultures, heritage, authenticity, and loss.

Pasifika theatre in the beginning was predominantly in English, and contained only a few words from Pacific languages. Along with the growing importance of different ethnicities in Pasifika theatre,

Pacific languages were incorporated more often, for example in *The Songmaker's Chair*, *Angels*, and *TauTai*. Carter identified the increase of Pasifika languages as 'the next level from introducing theatre as a genre, to tell your own stories about Niueans, Cook Islanders, and being in your own language' (CAR\_A). Other practitioners, such as Wendt, Kightley, Muagututi'a, and Lees, also mentioned that indigenous languages were important, but they did not elaborate on how they were of import.

Languages can create a divide between Pasifika and non-Pasifika audience, and between different Pasifika ethnicities, such as Tongan, Samoan. Thus, a Pacific language may be understood by one ethnicity only. Thus, plays in Pacific languages could result in excluding a large number of potential audience members and speaking only to the select few who understand. In addition, use of Pacific languages could highlight divisions within the Pan-Pasifika identity and potentially lead to a breach, as specific ethnicities become stronger. However, on a practical level, at this point there are only a few non-Samoan practitioners who create in their languages, and so speculations remain tentative. Declining language proficiency also limits the audience who can understand a language. The 'lost generation', children of those first-generation migrants who arrived to New Zealand between the 1950s and 1970s, were urged to speak English rather than their parent's native language (LEE). In Fuemana's *Falemalama* experiences of the lost generation are described as: 'in those early years of Fale being in New Zealand, and as soon as I could speak, I was her voice and ears. I was never allowed to speak Niuean or Samoan. Only English' (Fuemana, 2008, p. 71). As these children could not pass on Pacific languages to the next generation, further significant language loss occurred. Wendt, however, distinguished between understanding and being able to speak, and emphasised that even Pasifika youth has a passive knowledge of Pacific languages: 'a lot of New Zealand-born can't speak the language anymore, so they reply in English while the parents talk to them in Samoan. [...] It's nothing new' (WEN). Nevertheless, Lees argued that there was a significant language loss among younger adults, and therefore they might not understand Pacific languages spoken in theatre.

Using Pacific languages may be a form of resistance against the language of the dominant European community. Pacific languages in theatre may resist Pan-Pacific ideology, because they promote diversification of Pasifika communities in New Zealand, and they can break down the coloniser's generalising gaze. Historically, as Crow pointed out, the use of an indigenous language itself is a symbol of resistance, as the coloniser's language was by no means neutral (Crow & Banfield, 1996, p. 7). Both indigenous and colonisers' language can be used as resistance. Language choice, as Ngugi wa Thiong emphasised, was not only a form of resistance, but it signalled the intended audience.



Wendt acknowledged that language had a potential to create a divide in the audience, but he affirmed that it is not the case in *The Songmaker's chair*. He argued that because theatre is a combination of different elements and languages, such as embodiment, vocalization, and visual languages, audience members were able to follow his play:

The audience is not stupid; they work out from the context. What is the meaning? Plus I don't pick up anything even though I'm very good at English. When we see an English play we pick up different things. There is an assumption that that audience is stupid, or not intelligent, and it's very insulting to the audience. (WEN)

Wendt disregarded that language can be a problem for the audience because audience's familiarity with genre and their ability to derive meaning from the context allows the audience to follow the plot. However, other practitioners explained that there are different levels of understanding, describing a pyramid model of understanding in which the more levels one understands, the more satisfaction one gains from a theatre experience. Therefore, the less one understands, the more excluded one can get from the experience. Thus the main question is not whether one can follow the plot but whether one's experience is reduced to trying to follow the plot in theatre.

Pacific languages can increase the play's historical authenticity. *The Songmaker's Chair* had Samoan dialogues and the show's producers were hesitant whether audience members would understand. As Wendt remembered: 'that was a big worry we had in the beginning. The dramaturg and the other people, they said: "there is too much Samoan in the play" and I said "I am sorry we are going to keep it there" ' (WEN). Wendt argued that Samoan must be kept for authenticity because Pasifika families often mix languages: 'that's the way Samoan families, especially first-generation families and New Zealand-born kids talk to each other' (WEN). Wendt, though, was adamant that the goal was historical rather than cultural authenticity: 'I am not making it Samoan by using Samoan' (WEN).

Nevertheless, Pacific languages are sometime cut in order to make plays more enjoyable for European audience members. During *Angels*, the director cut out Samoan because the show was aimed at a European audience. As one cast member remembered: 'We had a lot of Samoan in Angels, and had to cut out a lot so that the Palangi audience would understand it. They don't cut Shakespeare so we can understand it' (ANO1). The cast member considered the cuts a result of uneven power balance between European and Pasifika people, and compared Pacific languages to Shakespeare's language, which in turn excludes Pasifika people. However, she did not contemplate whether the contemporary European audience understands Shakespeare's original at all, even though English in Shakespeare's time was very different from contemporary New Zealand English, and she reasserted Shakespeare as a symbol of European culture and dominance that kept Pasifika people outsiders. Practitioners objected against ways languages are filed as problematic in

contemporary monolingual Anglo-Saxon cultures: ‘when they see dance shows do they understand what’s it about or should we stop and translate it for them?’ (ANO1). Thus everyone thinks they understand dance, even though they do not understand the nuances and choreography, yet languages are seen as unknown and problematic in New Zealand society. Lees, however, argued that languages were not always problematic, for instance most people do not understand German or Italian operas, but enjoyed it nevertheless. Thus for bilingual practitioners like Lees, languages are not difficult even if they do not understand them, but for the European audience in New Zealand, who only speak English language is a serious issue. Because New Zealand theatre is dominated by monolingual Europeans, their expectations limit what Pasifika theatre makers can do in the mainstream, in particular they restrict the way practitioners can express their cultural identity in their work if they want to perform it to a European audience. Whether such limitations will lead to Pasifika theatre practitioners changing their work so that European audience members are satisfied, or whether their wish to express their cultural identity will lead to inclusion of Pasifika languages and consequent split between mainstream European theatre and Pasifika theatre is however too early to tell.

Works from the Western canon were used in numerous Pasifika plays, such as in *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* by Pacific Theatre, *Bare* by Toa Fraser, and *Romeo and Tusi* by Pacific Underground. *Romeo and Tusi* took Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and adapted it to a Samoan-Maori neighbourhood. The characters rehearsed *Romeo and Juliet* for a school production. The characters’ attempts to understand the play’s language are mostly humorous. The prologue drew attention to the tension between Shakespeare’s text and the students’ lives. When Ruby, a fa’fafine in charge of the play, started to recite ‘two households, both alike in dignity’, he was interrupted by Tusi’s mother, who urged him to ‘hurry up’. Tusi, as Juliet, then explained to Ruby that: ‘the audience can’t understand what your [sic] saying’. Ruby’s answer indicates that understanding was not her purpose: ‘It’s Shakespeare, some things you aren’t supposed to understand’ (Kightley et al., 2000, p. 1). The dialogue revealed that language has power to include or exclude audience members, and shape their understanding and experience of a play. It was also a criticism of the dominant culture, from which Pasifika people often felt excluded. Through discussing, interpreting, and altering Shakespeare’s text, Pasifika theatre practitioners made it accessible for Pasifika audience members, whilst also criticising the dominant discourse that excludes Pasifika people.

However, most Pasifika plays are in English, and only include a few words in Pacific languages, a possible result of language loss among Pasifika people, but equally possibly due to Pasifika theatre practitioners wanting to attract an European audience. Pan-Pasifika self-determination developed

since the beginning of Pasifika theatre. However languages seem to pose an obstacle to self-determination of Pasifika ethnicities, such as Tongan, Fijian, and Samoan, because languages are specific to ethnicities, and the number of those who create in these specific minority languages is minor. Exceptions are Samoan theatre makers, who create the majority of Pasifika plays, and often incorporate Samoan in their plays. Nevertheless, practitioners' emphasis on the importance of language suggests that it is becoming increasingly important.

### **7.3 Conclusions**

Migration and its aftermath are still powerful themes in Pasifika theatre. Second-generation practitioners focused on migration stories and faced increased pressures from first-generation Pasifika people to pioneer and do their best. Second-generation practitioners learned to navigate the boundaries between New Zealand and Pasifika cultures, which for third-generation practitioners came naturally. Third-generation practitioners considered migration a historical reference but emphasised that it was still relevant because Pasifika people still face migration's consequences, described as the lack of improvement in Pasifika people's socioeconomic conditions. Pacific languages are still rarely used in Pasifika theatre, with the exception of Samoan. Pacific languages are exotic and authentic, but their use may be problematic for audience members from other ethnicities as well as Pasifika audiences affected by language loss. With this in mind, the next chapter explores who the demographic structure of Pasifika theatre us makes up the audience of Pasifika theatre.

## Chapter 8: Pasifika theatre's audience

Practitioners' accounts reveal differences in the ethnic composition between home and touring audience, as tours are increasingly attended by European theatregoers. This chapter proposes that while the Pasifika audience attends theatre for the familiar and entertaining, the European audience seeks a safe encounter with the Other.

### 8.1 Mixed ethnicity: regular theatre goers and Pasifika support

The subject of which groups attend Pasifika performances has only been explored by Carter, who found that Pasifika people are the sole significant audience of Pasifika theatre (Carter, 2002). This notion of the Pasifika audience as one-dimensional is questioned by much of what practitioners themselves said during interviews. This chapter, using Kila Kokonut Krew as a case study, explores the possibility that a heterogeneous audience creates dilemmas. Kila Kokonut Krew is chosen because they have accumulated data on their audience composition, and also because they are a prolific and popular theatre troupe.

Kila Kokonut Krew is conscious of audience building and marketing, and to maximise revenues members learn who their audience is. Before every show, the cast photographs the audience. Manusaute went so far as to claim 'I can send you all the photos of the audience'. Manusaute and Leilua described their audience as diverse, and they argued that the pictures were 'an absolute proof that our work is for everyone' and for 'anyone' (MAN; LEI). They explained the claim to diversity on secondary characteristics of race, ethnicity, gender, and age. These claims were backed up by Kightley and Muagututi'a, who also characterised their audience as ethnically diverse.

A significant proportion of Kila Kokonut Krew's audience is European. Leilua recalled her surprise that during a *Once were Samoans* tour: '90% of the audience for the whole tour was white'. This was unusual, because the show featured an all-Samoan cast, and was about a multiethnic Samoan and Maori family (LEI). In fact, their audience on tours were often dominated by Europeans: 'we toured everywhere and there were many middle class white people coming to see us' (MAN). In Hamilton, New Zealand, Europeans made up the majority of the audience: 'we went to Hamilton and 95 % of our audience was white! It was a sold out season, full of white middle aged people' (LEI). The large European audience is especially noteworthy, because according to the 2006 Census only 63.7% of Hamilton's population is of European ethnicity, therefore the difference between Leilua's estimate and demographic data shows that Europeans were overrepresented in the audience (Statistics New Zealand, 2006b). In the case of Kila Kokonut Krew there was a discrepancy between audience seen on tours or when collaborating with Auckland Theatre Company, who were often European, and

local performances that relied on a Pasifika fan-base. However, different Pasifika plays attracted different audience members, and therefore arguments about the audience are not generalised. The Laughing Samoans show in Hamilton (2010) attracted primarily Pasifika audience members, while Victor Rodgers' plays were attended largely by a European audience. For Kila Kokonut Krew both audiences were considered important, but European audience numbers were growing rapidly.

### **8.1.1 Social-economic differences and theatre attendance**

The European audience was contrasted with the Pasifika audience based on socio-economic differences. Manusaute described the European audience as a 'credit card audience', because they consistently contributed to the company's revenues (MAN). Practitioners often mentioned that people with more disposable income are more likely to attend theatre and people from a lower socioeconomic background are less likely to attend. Leilua emphasised that ticket prices were a barrier for Pasifika audience:

The problem is that it's so expensive, even for me. I have so many friends, and they do production, and they go "come watch my show". And I would want to say I go, but they charge you x amount of dollars for a ticket. If it costs 35 dollars per person, people just go cannot afford it. (LEI)

Ticket prices determine theatre attendance, and practitioners I interviewed repeatedly argued that if prices were too high, attendance would fall. The 'ideal' price of theatre attendance is complicated by the target audience, thus shows that cater for families have cheaper ticket prices so that families can afford it. Both Kila Kokonut Krew and Pacific Underground pride themselves in being family oriented. As for the style, the language is family friendly, there is no swearing or rough language, explained practitioners: 'we always make our shows no swearing. So it's open to all audiences, and everyone can bring their kids. It is still funny but we do not have that stuff in there' (LEI). Such community and family focus is both a limitation and an advantage. On the one hand it is positive that the shows could attract wider a Pasifika audience, and on the other hand it is a limitation for the company that ticket prices are kept relatively low so performances remain affordable for families. Kila Kokonut Krew members identified reducing ticket prices as the only way to attract families: 'the way to reach out to people who can't afford is to make it more accessible, to drop the prices, so that people can come to the theatre' (LEI).

Nonetheless, theatre faces competition as there is more affordable and accessible entertainment available. Theatre is considered expensive: 'a lot of my family they say it's not they are not interested but [...] what is the cost. Always been cheaper to go to the movies, now it's even cheaper to download something' (LEI). Theatre is still more expensive than other forms of entertainment, thus it remains 'inaccessible' for those from a lower socioeconomic background. Pasifika theatre

practitioners acknowledged that keeping costs down is difficult (LEI). While producing a show requires time and resources, audience numbers are relatively low, compared to movies for instance. Thus, theatre is seen as an elitist art form compared to other forms of entertainment, because it is less familiar and more expensive. While this is not peculiar to Pasifika theatre, practitioners argued that it is especially problematic in Pasifika theatre, because Pasifika people are often not all familiar or interested in theatre.

Pasifika theatre practitioners I interviewed described theatre as a European dominated industry, which explains why audience members are predominantly European. Theatre practitioners argued that in New Zealand, the theatre going audience is middle class and European, which is partially attributed to the idea that the European audience was more 'educated' in theatre. 'Education' consisted of exposure to the art form because plays catered for Europeans from school age. Thus, because of its price and the audience's background knowledge, theatre was described as elitist. Because of affordability and familiarity with theatre, it was considered an art form for Europeans. The 'elitist' nature of theatre was juxtaposed with Pasifika theatre practitioners' wish to make it more democratic and accessible for Pasifika people who otherwise could not afford it or who are not familiar with theatre.

### **8.1.2 Target audience and European audience**

Practitioners consider Pasifika people the target audience for Pasifika theatre. Pasifika theatre practitioners want to raise the profile of and empower Pasifika people, as discussed in Chapter 5, and therefore it is primarily geared towards Pasifika audiences. A historical overview supports practitioners' statements. In the beginning of Pasifika theatre, audiences were mainly Pasifika and the plays were introspective. *Le Matau* explored migration, *Fresh Off the Boat* dealt with migration, addiction, and crime, Statement Theatre gathered its stories from the community, and *Dawn Raids* and *Tatau* negotiated history and identity. Later, practitioners started to look 'outside', and other ethnicities were represented more. At the same time, Pasifika plays portrayed social issues with more complexity. *Niu Sila*, Kila Kokonut Krew productions, *NO.2*, *Mapaki*, *The Packer*, and Victor Rodgers' plays have more ethnicities, and they depict social issues in a more complex, 'more sophisticated' way, as Maiava described it. While Maiava argued that the reason for change is that theatre practitioners matured, not all theatre practitioners participated in the previous 'fearless stages' of Pasifika theatre (KIG). As an overall trend, European audience numbers grew and the number of ethnicities depicted in Pasifika theatre increased. While practitioners described support from the community, especially in home performances as an important factor, revenues from European audiences have become more important for Pasifika theatre practitioners. For Kila

Kokonut Krew, audience revenues were a significant part of the company's income, because the company did not receive substantial funding for many of its shows (MAN). There is a perceived contradiction between the growing number of European audiences and creating theatre with Pasifika audiences in mind.

But if Pasifika theatre is made for Pasifika audiences, what is in it for European audiences? Practitioners argued that the 'Pasifika flavour' was seen as a fashionable trend that led to Pasifika theatre's growth (CHA). At the same time, Wendt argued that Pasifika theatre's universal themes are interesting to audiences regardless of age, gender, and ethnicity (see Chapter 6) (WEN).

While practitioners' answers have some explanatory power, I argue that Pasifika theatre is interesting for European audiences because it represents a safe encounter with the Other. As shown in Chapter 5, in Pasifika theatre in and out-groups were marked based on ethnicity, partially because of the social and geographical distance between Pasifika and European communities (MAN; ANO1). Further, a main source of knowledge about Pasifika people for Europeans is television, including late-night news, which does not always paint a positive picture, explained practitioners. According to these descriptions, Pasifika people remain unfamiliar and somewhat exotic to a large proportion of the European population due to a lack of interaction. Therefore, theatre offers an opportunity for audiences who have minimal interaction with Pasifika people to gain familiarity. As Manusaute explained, European audiences visit theatre to understand the Other: 'because the question is why, where are we going, who are we, and I'm sure my credit card audience always appreciates that, they always come to understand, try to understand our people, Pacific people' (MAN). Audience interactions reinforced the argument that European audiences are looking for the Other, as Manusaute described: 'when we did *Taro King*, an older woman, a white woman said to me "this has to be seen by a wider audience", and that struck a chord in me' (MAN). The typical audience is described in terms of difference from Pasifika people, and it represents the stereotypical theatregoer: middle-aged, European, and educated, or as Manusaute described: an 'older woman, white woman'. For these audiences, stereotypes such as 'authentic' Pacific, dusky maiden, and savages lost their relevance in urbanised New Zealand. Therefore, European audiences seek contemporary Pasifika authenticity, in an authentic Pasifika theatre.

For centuries, European culture was fascinated by the exotic, the Other and the unknown, and longed for authenticity at the same time. This fascination still exists, and can be best exemplified by Coco Fusco's and Guillermo Gomez-Peña's performance piece *Undiscovered Americans*. Fusco and Gomez-Peña locked themselves in a cage and performed a cultural Other, pretending to be

members of a newly discovered indigenous tribe. Fusco almost twenty years later still remembered audiences' response as a surprise, as recorded in my journal:

We were sitting in the computer room, waiting for the programmes to arrive and started talking about her work. [...] She told me that when she did the piece in the museum, "some of them actually thought it was real". [...] What was interesting is that the very same day, I had the same – or rather reverse experience: a group of indigenous people came up to me after their performance piece and asked if they can take a picture with me. Well, at least I think this is what they asked because I did not understand a word. They just hugged me and there was a flash. (Journal entry, 2010 August, 'Day 2 Belem')

The journal entry showed that in 1992, during Fusco's and Gomez-Peña's performance, audiences were still fascinated by Other. Being othered evoked a strong reaction, which I came understand as a mix of amusement and displacement. Manusaute's reaction to the woman in Christchurch was first amused, which then turned into an aversion of being Othered, because he is not European. It also reinforced his ideas about separate social spaces for European and Pasifika people. While his negative feelings towards being othered prevailed, he did not want to exclude European audiences because they were his 'credit card audience', and he was financially dependent on them.

The division between the populations is expressed in another anecdote, when a spectator after a performance thanked performers for 'letting [her] in [their] world' (MAN). The anecdote exemplifies that the European audience gains insight to the lives of Pasifika people whilst remaining in their own comfort zone; no trip to South Auckland was necessary. Thus, Pasifika theatre is a controlled environment, as Manusaute argued:

They don't have the luxury to actually come out here and experience, and I'm sure you know it yourself when you walk in this building. This is my world, my reality, where the voice comes from to create my world. And the audience becomes part of it when they turn up. (MAN)

Pasifika theatre, which practitioners described as similar to reality, provides an insight to the unfamiliar life of Pasifika people. Thus, Pasifika theatre is a meeting place, and it facilitates access to the Other. Pasifika theatre can be considered a meeting of the two cultures, a liminal, almost ceremonial space (Smith, 2010). Bhabha's description of a hallway interprets a liminal space as a space between different units of architecture, that represents distinct spaces of cultures (1994a, p. 8). Pasifika theatre is then a meeting point of cultures: the space is indeed liminal; it is neither European, due to its Pasifika subject matter, nor Pasifika, due to the medium being strongly European in its origin and connotation.

During the theatre experience, Pasifika and European people may connect. European audience leave the liminal space with new impressions, but what are the impressions, what is the 'world' they thanked Manusaute for? Audiences' and practitioners' perceptions of the insight into Pasifika



people's life may have differed. If populations are as divided as practitioners claim, the majority of European audiences' knowledge and impressions of Pasifika people were gathered primarily from the media, augmented by only rare encounters with Pasifika people. The 'world' Kila Kokonut Krew presents does not include Gauguinesque women or images of savages, but it features families living in an urbanised society. Their performances do not reflect the late crime news either, where Maori and Pasifika people are overrepresented. Thus, theatre is an important medium in shaping the image of Pasifika people, and theatre is part of knowledge construction, because it takes up an educational role for European audiences. Therefore, it may be that Pasifika theatre by selectively adding to the knowledge of European audiences about Pasifika people brings the two populations closer. However, theatre spaces in which the two audiences meet also sets them apart by emphasising differences. Furthermore, the existence of a liminal space presupposes that there are spaces that need to be connected; consequently, Pasifika and European audiences are in different spaces, which is expressed as social criticism by artists such as Manusaute and Aumua.

Pasifika theatre attendance is a safe encounter, because both audiences remain in their relative comfort zones. Pasifika audiences see Pasifika actors, performing a production about Pasifika people, and they are familiar with Pacific languages, issues, and in-jokes. European audiences, however, are familiar with theatre spaces and conventions, and universal themes and issues discussed during performances. Crime and addictions, discussed in Pasifika plays, are not limited to one ethnic group or another. In addition, themes such as family and relationships, death, love, and betrayal extend beyond ethnic groups. A journal entry of a visit to a performance of the Laughing Samoans illustrates this argument:

While in the lobby, in the queue for the bathroom, two ladies started chatting to me. It made me strangely self-conscious, because they were whispering and on top of it, I realised that everyone else except the three of us looked Pasifika. The older one just approached me and said "Thanks God we are not alone", and the other one whispered even more quietly something along the lines of "It was fine in the dark during the show, but its kinda strange now, isn't it?". Then they explained in a normal voice that they were mother and daughter, and the daughter wanted to treat her mom to something special, so she took her to the show.' (Journal Entry, 2010 November 19, Hamilton)

During the show the European audience members felt safe, protected by the familiar setting and the dark; only after the performance did they feel they were intruding. A theatre encounter in performative terms is controlled and performed with limited interaction. Pasifika theatre follows a Western model, where the audience can lean back, feel safe, and observe the performance. It is possible for audience members to remain in the dark of the auditorium, and observe the stage while being 'invisible'. Theatre experience can remain at a level of watching the Other, and the audience can keep their preconceived notions.

There is a difference between the stated intent of practitioners and social goals they wish to illuminate through theatre and the possibility or inevitability of this being compromised by selling their work to an increasingly European audience. Such contradiction between the target audience and the European audience raises the question whether practitioners in fact target both audiences. Like any minority theatre, Pasifika theatre faces the task of simultaneously speaking to insiders and outsiders by entertaining and transforming insiders and representing Pasifika culture to outsiders. There should be a conflict between representing one's community to the outside world and discussing social issues that may negatively expose the community. However, there is absolutely no evidence that Pasifika theatre practitioners consider the European audience's interest when creating their shows. Practitioners I interviewed remained silent about the ways they cater to the European audience in general, which may reflect the trend being a recent one, to which theatre makers have not yet responded. Equally, it may suggest that Pasifika practitioners do not see a contradiction between targeting a Pasifika audience and a larger European audience. However, Pasifika theatre influences European audience's perceptions of what Pasifika people are like. If practitioners continued with presenting negative stereotypes, social issues, and taboos, it could damage Pasifika people's image. At the same time Pasifika theatre's reliance on comedy could promote the 'happy and funny' image of Pasifika people, reducing theatre makers to entertainers for the European audience (HEK). Anae already raised her voice for Pasifika comedy's role in strengthening negative stereotypes and if the trend continues, more criticism may be expected. As a result, it is likely that Pasifika theatre practitioners will consider the European audience and change their work to represent Pasifika theatre favourably. Conclusions however remain tentative, because collaborations with mainstream theatre companies and the growing number of European audience members are a recent trend, and because practitioners avoided answering the question. In addition, reviews are either written by Pasifika, or differentiate the performance based on it being Pasifika.

A search for authenticity may be the answer for satisfying both audiences, because a European audience would likely resist a Pasifika theatre pandering to perceived European preferences. Therefore, as long as Pasifika theatre's target audience is Pasifika people, authenticity in the Europeans eyes prevails. At the same time, Pasifika audiences benefit from a theatre that aims to entertain and change their communities. Pasifika theatre practitioners' claim that Pasifika theatre represented Pasifika people in a 'true' and authentic fashion may be what European audience members are interested in.

### 8.1.3 Understanding of in-jokes and cultural references

Practitioners I interviewed emphasised that Pasifika theatre was for 'everyone', but they also argued that Pasifika theatre provides different experiences for European and Pasifika people. Differences in audience's background knowledge could result in different audience reactions. Practitioners described that Pasifika audience members responded to in-jokes, and, as Wendt pointed out, during *The Songmaker's Chair* 'all the Samoans would pick up the subtle jokes' (WEN). The difference between Pasifika and non-Pasifika audience reactions is explained by knowledge of Samoan and Pasifika culture: 'the way a Pacific Island audience responds to it is different to the way a non-PI audience will respond. Partially, because they get it all, nuances, the kind of Samoan language passages, references, understand it on a different level' (AVI). Practitioners I interviewed thought that Pasifika audience members understand Pasifika theatre better, because they have insider knowledge. This analysis on the one hand suggests that plays need to be humorous to satisfy Pasifika whilst seeming authentic which satisfies Europeans. On the other hand, practitioners argue that Pasifika audience members understand Pasifika theatre on 'a different level', which provides a richer experience. Such hierarchy may suggest exclusion of non-Pasifika audiences, based on knowledge and experience related to ethnicity. However, Pasifika theatre is a space of reversal of power relations rather than exclusion, as Kightley explained: 'once upon a time a PI would get to the theatre and maybe not get the jokes and now it was reversed'. Theatre thus becomes a setting where Pasifika people can become insiders, and where post-migration power dynamics are reversed. With such temporary reversal, Pasifika practitioners disturb the status quo.

Nevertheless, practitioners added that different audiences react differently, regardless of their understanding of the play. The European audience was often described as more reserved, as Wendt explained: 'because of your upbringing, you react differently' (WEN). In addition to ethnicity, practitioners argued that audience reactions are gendered: 'women react different from men. I found that over the years, it is because the different upbringing and things' (WEN). Interestingly, other factors I expected, like generational or ethnicity-specific differences were not emphasised. However, gender differences aside, ethnicity was unanimously regarded by practitioners as the main dividing factor among audiences.

One reason for the overriding importance of ethnicity is that practitioners' cultural background influences their work. Even Avia, who often hesitated to describe herself as a Pasifika artist, revealed that: 'I'm always going to make my art from who I am and what I know and that's always going to be the starting point and being Samoan is part of who I am and what I know' (AVI). The cultural knowledge, language, socio-economic conditions, and history are identified by practitioners as major

influences in their work, which then may constitute the difference between the understanding and experience of Pasifika and non-Pasifika audiences. Pasifika practitioners thus revisit a classic insider-outsider dilemma: Is it better to be an insider with similar cultural knowledge, but also with similar boundaries and preconceptions; or is it more beneficial to be an outsider, with less knowledge and life experiences of the culture, but also with possible different judgments and limiting notions?

While the insider view is seen to lead to a richer experience by some practitioners, others point to an observational bias, and emphasise that Pasifika audience members are more expressive to begin with, thus even European audience members can benefit.

#### **8.1.4 Different approaches to theatre: ‘intellectualising’ and ‘consuming’ theatre**

Practitioners distinguished the European audience’s attitudes to theatre from Pasifika audience’s approach. European audience members were thought to approach theatre more ‘intellectually’ than Pasifika audiences (MAI; MAN). ‘Intellectualising’ was an expression used to describe internalisation and analysis of the performance, and the word’s use was limited to the European audience: ‘because my type of audience, my Pacific audience, also turns up, wanting to support. They don’t want to intellectualise the work [...] The European audiences soak it up’ (MAN). However, practitioners argued that theatre has different function for the European than for the Pasifika audience. While Pasifika audience see it as a form of entertainment through which they express support for Pasifika communities, the European audience expects a cultural experience and intellectual challenge.

Let us revisit the dilemma of theatre as a mirror. Practitioners wanted to change society through theatre, but at the same time they felt like they need to modify content to please Pasifika audience members as discussed in Chapter 5. In addition, they argued that the Pasifika audience sees theatre foremost as a form of entertainment. Can entertainment and social change be combined? To further explore this question, two qualities of a mirror image need to be considered. For one, a mirror image can be humorous, because the audience realises that what they see is close to reality but is not reality. Thus, they have an opportunity to laugh at themselves without being offended. Especially because Pasifika theatre is comedy based, mirror images can entertain its audience. Another possibility is that mirror images provide a subjective perspective, and allow the audience to see what they want to see: ‘The mirror is the looking glass into my soul’ explained Iza, N. in Maiava’s radio play *Skin Deep* (Maiava, 2011, p. 12.43). The mixed ethnicity character, brought up by his Samoan grandmother, drew attention to the difference between mirror image and reality. Standing front of a mirror, he tried to tattoo his name on his chest, but the image was reversed, and Iza N. appeared as Nazi. Similarly to Iza’s story, while practitioners might be to transform society while entertaining, audiences see a different image from what practitioners present. Thus it may be that it is not only

practitioners who are reverse chameleons; the images they show their audience are reversed as well.

Practitioners argued that European audience members 'intellectualise' and 'soak up theatre', and suggested that European audiences see the theatre as an intellectual activity, as opposed to Pasifika audience members, who see it as a form of entertainment and a community event. Thus, it is possible that different audience members can find different purposes even in the same play. Spectators' subjectivity, based on their expectations of theatre as an art form, can make their experiences significantly different. Pasifika audience's experiences may be as different from European audience's impressions as Schechner's experience of the Ram Lila festival was radically different from the pilgrims', whose aim was to honour the gods (Schechner, 1993). Schechner, the outsider and performance researcher, described the festival experience for pilgrims as simultaneously a ritual and entertainment, but for him it was an intellectual as much as a sensory experience. In the end, he left and felt he learned something about the entertaining festival and the pilgrims, which is parallel to European audience's experiences. In Pasifika theatre, it may be that insider Pasifika audience's experiences are fundamentally different from non-Pasifika audience's impressions as European audience members approach theatre more intellectually and as outsiders. In addition, European audience members are described as consumers of theatre, referred to as a 'credit card audience' (MAN; LEI). Pasifika practitioners see European audiences as theatregoers who can afford theatre and are educated in theatre, familiar with the conventions, and history. Thus, Europeans may benefit from Pasifika theatre on an intellectual and aesthetic level, but they are unable to experience the spectrum of experiences Pasifika theatre offers, for the reason that they do not partake in its community building and therapeutic functions. Therefore, they are thought of as consumers, rather than participants of Pasifika theatre. Such distinction acknowledges their contribution to ticket sales, but questions the totality of their experience due to their lack of understanding of in-jokes and cultural references.

### **Humour and political correctness**

Pasifika theatre often uses politically incorrect humour, and practitioners argued that Pasifika and European audiences reacted differently to such humour. Pasifika theatre makers' political incorrectness, or 'edginess' is attributed to their minority status in New Zealand, as Riley argued: 'I can talk about race, because I am half-Samoan' (O'Donnell, 2002); RIL; KIG). Contrasting descriptions about the two audiences reveals that the Pasifika audience enjoys politically incorrect humour, as Avia described:

Particularly with painful subjects that Samoans laugh, kind of part of our strange national sense of humour, we laugh at painful things. It's really fun to perform to a PI audience because they think it's hilarious, they all laugh at things a Palangi audience can't laugh at. (AVI)

In contrast, the European audience seems 'uncomfortable' compared to the Pasifika audience:

[It is a] different experience performing for Palangi audience, because they are often very uncomfortable, because I'm talking about taboo things very often, and I can see that they are squirming in their seat. That they are not laughing that doesn't mean there is not a response. (AVI)

The two quotes show that the cultural script in sensitive situations is different for European and Pasifika people, specifically, while Pasifika people respond with laughter, European audience members squirm and feel uncomfortable. Reactions are influenced by one's upbringing and background. However, majority and coloniser status of European audience members also influence their public response to politically incorrect humour and taboos. Avia used the expression 'permission to laugh', because while individual differences between European audiences were noted, the majority of the European audience were described as more reserved in their reactions during Pasifika plays. 'Permission to laugh' implied a reversal of power dynamics, where European audience members felt that it would be offensive to laugh. It is a reversal, because restrictions are applied to the dominant European culture but not to minorities. The restrictions are part of the dominant discourse and are developed within the European culture to foster political correctness, neutrality, or to deal with the guilt of the powerful. Authorities, those who can grant permission, however are invisible. The authority is not the performer, other members of audience, or victims and sufferers of social and personal injustice.

The invisible authority is a combination of European audience members' upbringing, expectations, scripted social behaviours, other audience members. European audience members' reactions may reflect the cultural consciousness of majority populations and descendants of the colonisers, and it manifests itself in increased political correctness. Such a paradigm of political correctness is present in institutions and official discourses, and the idea of 'permission to laugh' suggests that it affected individuals as well. However, practitioners described laughter as 'infectious', because Europeans often laugh when they see Pasifika audience members laughing (KIG; WEN). Thus, for the European audience, the affirmation that it is acceptable to laugh comes from the Other. However, there are clear boundaries, and European audience members do not always join in the laughter. As Avia explained: 'I think Palangi audiences just don't feel the permission to laugh. I am not saying no Palangi person ever laughs, but it might be just one person laughing and the rest is shifting in their seats. I think it's funny' (AVI). What is acceptable for Pasifika people is not always acceptable among Europeans, and therefore, the permission granted by the Other did not extend to all situations. Thus,

reactions to political correctness constitutes a temporary power reversal, because the majority, the coloniser, and powerful groups cannot be politically incorrect towards disadvantaged groups, especially when these are present. Nonetheless, the discourse of political correctness is attached to the colonisers' and the majority's guilt as it is in fact created by those in power. In addition, the need for political correctness means there is racism and separation within society. Therefore, European spectators might shift in their seats and feel uncomfortable, but such temporary power reversal does not eradicate racism.

## **8.2 Building and audience: theatre as a new art form**

Pasifika theatre is a young theatre movement, and its history is simultaneous with the growth of its audience. It is particularly interesting to look at Pasifika theatre's audience development, because Pasifika theatre's short history and small size may make trends in audience development clearer than other larger and older theatre movements. Pasifika theatre's audience development can be described in four scenes.

### **Scene 1**

In the 1970s and 1980s Statement Theatre and Pacific Theatre started in a void. There were no Pasifika playwrights, actors, or companies. Statement Theatre was created to fill a gap in schools' curriculum because only European companies visited schools at that time. Simeu Barton started Pacific Theatre in a hostile and racist environment, and Auckland University did not even want Pasifika actors in its festival. There was an interested audience, but these companies worked in a void.

### **Scene 2**

In the beginning of the 1990s when Pacific Underground was formed, community support was one of the most important elements of success, remembered Kightley. Friends and family would come to their show and Kightley revealed that: 'it was an amazing time, we had an amazing support from the community in Christchurch' (KIG). Pasifika theatre was in the early years of its development, and Pacific Underground was one of the first companies that introduced Pasifika theatre to the world: 'there was stuff happening in Auckland as well, but it was great for PU to be part of that evolution of PI theatre, and getting the stories out' (KIG). Pacific Underground was involved in education and brought Pasifika theatre to a range of schools.

### **Scene 3**

In the late 1990s, when The Naked Samoans was established, there were more Pasifika actors, playwrights, and performances. Kightley, who worked with Pacific Underground before, remembered that the audience was divided: 'We had some of our audience who loved it, and some who knew our old stuff with Pacific Underground and hated it: "what the hell"?; because they expected what we did before. There was a lot of new audience, Pakeha' (KIG). The Naked Samoans built on Pacific Underground's audience, but their comedy attracted a new, wider audience as well.

#### Scene 4

Lastly, Kila Kokonut Krew started out almost a decade later, when companies such as Pacific Underground, The Naked Samoans, and The Laughing Samoans were already successful; they had a 'massive audience' (MAN). Thus, there was an audience, which was familiar with and interested in Pasifika performance: 'they paved the way: Albert, Nat, Oscar, the Nakeds. Without them paving the way, warming the audience up, we would not be able to come out with the things we do in our Kila Kokonut Krew shows' (LEI). Kila Kokonut Krew started to build a fan base and expanded its audience through touring and collaborations. At the same time plays by like Rodgers, Fraser, Fuemana, and Nawalowalo were performed in popular venues and theatres for a primarily European audience. In addition, training initiatives for new playwrights were established.

#### **8.2.1 The core and expansion**

Most Pasifika companies started with a local core audience from which they grew. Pacific Underground's audience at first was friends, family, and the community. While the support of friends and family remained, they started to have a fan base, and their audience widened. The Naked Samoans described a similar dynamic before their fan-base expanded to European theatregoers. Leilua described Kila Kokonut Krew's core audience as 'support from friends, family and fan base', and argued that there was an expansion. Thus, all three companies developed from a localised core audience.

The growth is linked to marketing and merchandise, social networking, and maintaining interest and quality. Merchandise and marketing are considered important by all three companies: Pacific Underground produced CDs and has a band called Pacific Underground, Kila Kokonut Krew produces DVDs and other merchandise. Yet, the primary product is the theatre experience, as Manusaute described it: 'we don't make sandwiches, but offer a feeling to the people, who pay for it' (MAN). Social media also became more important: both Pacific Underground and Kila Kokonut Krew have Facebook groups, and Kila Kokonut Krew performances appeared on YouTube. Members of the company are conscious of their online visibility and see it as a means to reach a larger audience.



### 8.2.2 Introduction of Pasifika people to theatre: a history

Theatre as an art form is not traditional in the Pacific Islands; it was introduced by missionaries and learned in Bible School and Sunday School by generations of children. As explored in Chapters 2 and 6, performance was as an integral part of Samoan life, and theatre quickly became popular.

For New Zealand-born Pasifika people, their first experience in theatre was often during school, but a significant proportion of Pasifika People in New Zealand have not seen professional theatre (LEI). Kightley reflected on his own school years and explained that his school did not have trips to theatre, because they ‘always went to the bloody [sic] zoo’ (KIG). Although practitioners described Sunday School as their training ground, Leilua emphasised that professional theatre is a different experience: ‘not just the one in Sunday school. That is great. That’s where a lot of people get their knowledge of what live performance is, from church’. Thus, many Pasifika people think of theatre as amateur or community theatre. Furthermore, Pasifika students can feel culturally alienated or uninterested watching the European professional theatre shows that attend schools, because plays have little relevance to students’ lives (KIG; ANO1; LEE). As a result, students get discouraged from theatre. Therefore, most practitioners argued that introducing a new audience to theatre is one of their main goals:

I want Pacific people to be educated in theatre and theatre practices, and be able to say “I’ve been to a play”, and be part of an audience and a live performance of theatre. For me it’s such a special experience – I love it. I want everybody to be able to experience that. (LEI)

The theatre experience therefore was seen as a form of education, to learn conventions and an appreciation of the art form. Consequently, education and introducing Pasifika people to theatre was a way practitioners wanted to serve and develop their communities.

Practitioners advocated works that Pasifika people could identify with. Leilua wanted ‘Pacific people to come to the theatre, and see Pacific stories on the stage’ (LEI). As many Pasifika people have not been to the theatre, they did not know what to expect, as Kightley remembered: ‘there were occasionally people who expected that there would be intermission with popcorn, and there was laughter sometime’ (KIG). As behaviours in the theatre are dictated by Western conventions, first time Pasifika audience members were often not aware of how to behave in theatre. However, even Pasifika theatre companies followed scripts of Western theatre attendance. Kightley remembered the difference between European conventions and Pasifika audience behaviour:

The coolest thing was to see people come to see a play, first time in their lives, didn’t know how to act, or behave. Phone rang – man answered it, walked around talking, while the play was going. They didn’t know you have to have the phone off, what the polite theatre conventions were. (KIG)

Theatre is a Western art form, and the behaviours it dictates are inherently Western. Pasifika audience members' reactions, such as phoning and walking around, that did not conform to expected Western theatre behaviours and gradual development of Westernised audience behaviour indicated that Pasifika theatre and Pasifika audiences developed together. In some cases, audiences used Pasifika behavioural scripts in theatre. As described before, in several Pasifika cultures when a performer performs a specific dance, relatives and other people put money on the dancers oiled body. The money is usually used for fundraising purposes. In a Tongan church in Christchurch for instance, church goers raised their church's annual funds this way. A journal entry describes the event:

I was seated in the second row, with the other girls, the women sitting on chairs. In the middle there were woven mats, the children were sitting on the mats and on benches. The young of the community prepared dances, and when the night was coming to an end, the 'special' dances started, where the members of the community stuck money on the oiled bodies of the dancers. The dancers usually got the money from relatives and family, as a contribution to the church's funds, the girl sitting next to me. The little children, brothers and sisters were running around, collecting the money falling off the dancers and bringing it to those counting it in the back. Women, after giving money to the dancers, often joined them and danced. In the end of the evening they counted the money and announced how much they raised that night.' (Journal entry, 2009 August 23)

Kightley recalled that in a play they had the same dance, and to his surprise audience members donated money to the performers:

I remember we did a play in Wellington, and there is a scene when we did a dance, and when the dance is done normally people put money on you. And we were re-enacting this dance, and in the middle a woman walked up to me and put five dollars on the stage, it was neat because we're crossing that line. (KIG)

In Kightley's example an audience member on the one hand crossed the line between ritual and entertainment, and on the other she crossed the line between Pasifika traditions and Western theatre scripts. Kightley mentioned that first-time Pasifika theatre goers often use Pasifika behaviour scripts in Pasifika theatre: 'a Tokelauan friend wrote a play [Tautai], I co-directed, and the same thing happened' (KIG). When Pasifika audience members improvise, they create hybrid audience behaviours and resist theatre's prevailing Western expectations and norms.

However, practitioners considered introducing a new audience rewarding, because it transformed audience's ideas of theatre and educated Pasifika people.

That was actually the biggest reward, seeing first time theatre goers, because you were introducing them to the power of theatre. And you see the mark done, seeing them transformed by what they saw. Teaching, telling a story, and opening their eyes to the experience of going to the theatre. (KIG)

Kightley and other practitioners unanimously emphasised that theatre can transform the audience, and it is a form of education, which is more visible when the audience is first-time theatre goers.

### 8.2.3 Education and power

Plays can also be educational, and while most Pasifika theatre does not include indigenous history, Albert Wendt's play exemplified that it is possible to educate their audience through theatre. Wendt explained that *The Songmaker's chair* contained references and symbols from ancient Samoa, and the play 'aimed at me as the audience and at people who don't know much about this stuff' (WEN). An owl symbol appears repeatedly in play, because the owl was an important god in ancient Samoan religion. The owl was the spirit of the war god, Tongo. In Samoa, when a dead owl was found, a mourning ceremony took place, as if a person had died. Yet, the god continued to exist and appear in the shape of other owls (G. Turner, 1884). An owl was also thought to bring good or bad omen, depending on the direction and way it flew in some Samoan villages (Hastings, Selbie, & Gray, 1928). Wendt explained this to the actors, and argued that audience members became interested in the owl symbol as well, and therefore they could have researched it: 'the reactions even of Pakeha, they were very active, they wanted all the information that was in the play, about the ancient religion of Samoa and about being a migrant, the history of migration' (WEN). Thus the play made spectators interested in Samoan traditions and inspired them to learn more about them. In this sense, Pasifika theatre had an educational purpose.

The educational purpose is especially important because performances and rehearsals of *The Songmaker's chair* highlighted a gap in education. Neither actors nor audiences were familiar with the symbol of the owl before the play, and Wendt pointed out that only a few audience members knew ancient Samoan traditions and symbols well. Even his dramaturg argued that the audience would not understand. Thus Wendt pointed out that the few who understood the symbolism had a richer experience, and this knowledge was an advantage. Earlier, he explained that the play was for people like him, who are interested in Samoan traditions. While the play invited people to become insiders through further research and understanding, it was also a powerful criticism of the New Zealand education system for failing to incorporate Pasifika cultures and traditions. During *The Songmaker's Chair*, select audience members who knew about Samoan traditions became temporarily more powerful, because pre-Christian Samoan traditions enriched the audience's experience. At the same time these traditions subverted the dominant European worldview that occupies New Zealand theatre.

#### 8.2.4 Diaspora and international performances

Practitioners performed abroad increasingly, for example in Samoa, Hawaii and other Pacific Islands, as well as in Australia, Europe and Canada. Pasifika practitioners' reflection on the international market and the growing number of performances revealed that there is a 'demand for the right kind of work, in particular in dance and visual arts, but also for theatre' (CAR\_A). Nawalowalo explained that the international market had become more important, and emphasised that therefore quality and funding were essential. Similarly, Avia stressed that for an international audience, quality is the most important factor. Her performances in New Zealand, Morocco, Russia, Austria, Germany, and Israel received positive responses even when the audience had 'no cultural links or understanding of the Samoan thing' (AVI). She revealed:

The basic principle to what I consider to be a good artist: you must work on a more universal level, you just have to. [...] If I look at myself on an international scale, people in Moscow don't really care if I'm Pacific or not, they just want a good artist. (AVI)

Universal themes and excellent theatre were seen as the key to international success. However, Carter disagreed, emphasising that one of the selling points of New Zealand performance arts were Maori and Pasifika works, because they were unique on the international touring circuit. Through the example of Diana Fuemana's success in Toronto, he highlighted that cultural diversity and collaboration between different ethnicities made/makes New Zealand unique on the international theatre and theatre festival market:

Pacific and Asian, they are waiting to happen that's the future. Not only Pacific Islanders telling their own stories but also collaborations with other cultures. That might be unique to New Zealand. That may be what New Zealand theatre might turn into, in the next ten to twenty years, that vibrant culturally based theatre. The flavour we give to the word. (CAR\_A)

Multiculturalism and diversity thus became selling points; they represent New Zealand as a tolerant multicultural society other nations could aspire to. Carter added that the open nature of New Zealand society enabled theatre companies to bring up social issues which were not possible in other, less open societies:

A, we're a small country. B, we have a good theatre scene. C, the more mature we are the more we can give to each other without being offended. That's how we can deal with really heavy issues in theatre that maybe some other countries can't deal with because they are not ready. (CAR\_A)

The New Zealand theatre scene and New Zealand society were described as a mature, multicultural society that can discuss social issues in theatre freely. This view, however, is in stark contrast with other practitioners' assessments, discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, where they described themselves as outsiders in New Zealand society and argued that the dominant discourse silences practitioners. It is

unclear whether the disagreement signals a divide in Pasifika theatre, or the expectation that internal problems should be swept under the carpet when representing New Zealand abroad.

The performances of *The Songmaker's Chair* in Hawaii received positive reactions, even though Wendt, at first, was not sure how the audience would receive the play: 'when the play was out on in Hawaii, I was very fearful because it's a foreign country. And I thought they wouldn't understand the situation' (Wendt). However, the play was successful because audience members could identify with migration stories, as Wendt remembered:

I forgot that in Hawaii most of the population were migrants. So the reaction was absolutely wonderful. Would there be some migrant groups and third generation, which act like it, Chinese, Japanese, Philipinos, and all that mix. [...] So they find something to identify with in the play. (WEN)

Audience members identified with migration stories, regardless of ethnicity or generational differences. The play was about a family, which also helped audience members to identify with the story, as Wendt argued: 'plus family is the most basic unit in most countries so people are interested in that' (WEN). Wendt emphasised that the audience does need to identify with the stories and character, contradicting Avia who dismissed the importance of identification. Thus, practitioners disagreed whether the international market sought cultural relevance and identification, or purely quality entertainment. International performances nevertheless shape the image of New Zealand and Pasifika people in international audience's minds. This image construction is based on a conscious selection, as funding bodies such as Creative New Zealand have a significant role in deciding which performers have the opportunity to debut on the international market. So far, support for international performances has been allocated to Nawalowalo, Urale, and Fuemana, three women theatre makers whose work is not only exceptional, but that also transcended local issues and focused on more general social issues, including gender issues. Funding for international performances could determine the future of Pasifika theatre: if funding is continued to be allocated to formally experimental performances and female theatre makers, these directions could become stronger.

Regardless of what is most important for an international audience, Carter argued that international performances were necessary to ensure revenues, given that New Zealand was a small country. Carter emphasised that as artists develop, they go abroad: 'it has to happen to artists. When they get to a level of certain experiences, you have to come abroad to sustain the level you are on' (CAR\_A). While both Pacific Underground and Kila Kokonut Krew members agreed, and emphasised that the diminutive size of the New Zealand audience might impede the companies' growth, they targeted a different market, the diasporas.

Some practitioners I interviewed identified the Pacific diaspora as a growing market for Pasifika theatre (CAR\_A; POL; AVI; NAW). Carter argued that Pasifika theatre's 'main audiences are Pacific people [...] not Europeans' (CAR\_A). In terms of Pacific audiences, there is a market in New Zealand, Australia, and Hawaii, where there are 'huge communities' (CAR\_A). Australia was identified as a growing and accessible market because it was relatively close and had large communities of Pacific Peoples. Carter pointed out that 'lots of Pacific theatre has been tapping into' this region (CAR\_A). The Kila Kokonut Krew's show *Once were Samoans* toured in Australia (LEI). The tour was successful, which shows the market for Pasifika theatre: 'we went to Australia and rocked it' said Manusaute. The performances of *The Songmaker's Chair* in Hawaii revealed a similar market, which Wendt attributed to large migrant populations. *Vula*, by Nawalowalo, explained Leota, also relied on the Pacific diaspora in Europe. Practitioners unanimously emphasised that diasporic audiences are interested in Pasifika theatre mainly because of the cultural relevance, and that these audiences became more important for Pasifika companies as Pasifika theatre matured.

There is a difference between the international festival market, in which practitioners capitalise on Pasifika as exotic and New Zealand as a multicultural country, and diasporic markets, where practitioners' focus remains migration, social issues, and cultural references. As the importance of these markets grows, it may be that Pasifika theatre will split into two trends.

### 8.2.5 Pacific Islands

Practitioners performed in the Pacific Islands, and they noted that audience expectations and reactions differed from those in New Zealand. Pasifika practitioners thought they knew Samoa, but when they performed to a Samoan audience in Samoa, they realised the gap between Samoans in New Zealand and Samoans in Samoa. Manusaute toured in Samoa with The Brownies in 1997 and remembered: 'we are Samoans; we were so funny, except in Samoa'. The Brownies were already successful in New Zealand and expected that the Samoan audience would embrace the show.

We made the wrong mistake of taking it back to Samoa. We had 5000 people in the park waiting for the best comedy in New Zealand to be put on, and we bombed. It was not different, but we did not understand the audience. (MAN)

Manusaute realised that the Samoan audience had a different worldview and expectations.

Mavaega, from Pacific Underground, had a similar experience touring *Fresh off the Boat*, in Samoa.

The company did not investigate the differences between Pasifika and Samoan audiences, and received negative reaction in Samoa. Mavaega explained that they did not realise the extent of the cultural differences before: 'it was something we never thought about because we live here' (MAV).

Mavaega argued that the audience reacted negatively because they did not understand theatre, and thought it was a historical and factual story of migration. Manusaute's and Mavaega's anecdotes

signal that there is a difference between Samoan and Samoan-New Zealander audiences. Their assumption that the two audiences are similar suggests that they saw ethnicity and culture connected to ancestry and heritage rather than changing and fluid. Their reflections also revealed how differences caused by migration and acculturation to New Zealand culture separate the two audiences. The fact that theatre makers acculturated and have more common with New Zealanders than those in Samoa reinforces the image of the reverse chameleon: in Samoa they are too European and in New Zealand they are too Samoan. Thus, their difference from the majority populations makes them stand out in both environments regardless of their similarities.

## Chapter 9: Conclusions

The aim of the thesis was to explore how Pasifika theatre makers perform their cultural identities. Pasifika theatre started as a marginalised post-colonial migrant theatre and gradually became more popular and diverse. Contemporary Pasifika theatre is mainly concerned with the lasting effects of migration, and Pasifika people's minority status in New Zealand. The move away from stories of migration is an indication of Pasifika people's assimilation into New Zealand society. Emerging practitioners consider New Zealand to be their home, but descriptions of conflicted identities, both New Zealand and Pasifika, are frequent. The image of the romanticised lost homeland often appears to magnify dissatisfaction with New Zealand society, which provides proof that the frame of Pasifika theatre is New Zealand society. At the same time migration emerged as a defining historical reference for Pasifika people. Especially for third-generation practitioners, migration is only a historical reference that marks their ancestors' journey to the land of milk and honey. However, these practitioners, like second-generation practitioners, are disillusioned with Pasifika people's socio-economic progress in New Zealand. Nevertheless, New Zealand is their home and even though their primary ethnic identity remains Pasifika, they have increasingly assimilated and come to view the world through the double vision of the post-migrant.

The two main forms of Pasifika theatre, comedy and realist drama, rely on a mixture of Western realist theatre traditions, Pacific art forms, and global popular cultural influences. Furthermore, Pasifika theatre practitioners invoke indigenous traditions symbolically, which connects them to their Pacific heritage. A large proportion of second and third-generation Pasifika audiences encounter indigenous clowning elements for the first time in these Pasifika comedy shows. Thus, practitioners are then traditors, who introduce indigenous clowning in the new context. In addition, Pasifika comedy may be seen as the continuation of the clowning traditions into New Zealand. While Pasifika theatre is seen as marginalised, there is a growing number of collaborations with European companies. These often result in issues of control, because practitioners link ethnicity to authenticity and the right to represent Pasifika communities.

Growing consternation with the slow socio-economic progress of Pasifika people motivates practitioners to create a theatre that transforms Pasifika communities by empowering Pasifika people and raising awareness of social issues. Such a social agenda is in contrast to the need to moderate Pasifika theatre because of community pressure and audience preferences. Although there was a move from tight-knit hierarchical communities to a looser social structure, social control is still perceived by practitioners as real, and work deemed inappropriate by practitioners' communities may lead to social exclusion.



Pasifika audiences attend Pasifika theatre mainly in search for entertainment. In contrast, European audiences seek an encounter with the Other. Pasifika theatre thus fulfils a dual purpose: on the one hand, practitioners strive to keep performances attractive (that is, entertaining) for Pasifika audiences, while on the other hand, European audiences approach the experience in search of an encounter with the exotic. Through this encounter, theatre becomes a meeting space for two cultures. In fact, it is a liminal space: neither European (in view of the Pasifika subject matter) nor Pasifika (as the medium is essentially European). Nevertheless, while the practitioners dislike being Othered, they rely on European audiences for funding. Whereas one might expect a conflict between representing Pasifika to the outside world positively and realistically, as presumably practitioners would want to present Pasifika people positively and break stereotypes, the practitioners interviewed did not consider how representing Pasifika people in a 'truthful' way could influence Pasifika people's image among European audiences.

European audiences' quest for the Other may be because European and Pasifika people often live in different socio-economic, geographical, and cultural spaces. Such separation further strengthens Pasifika theatre practitioners' self-identification as outsiders who are marginalised in New Zealand. The difference between ethnicities is also apparent in the construction of identities. Pasifika identities are found to be constructed in terms of boundaries and difference from European and Maori communities. Europeans are distinguished by their majority status and individualism, as opposed to Pasifika people's marginalised status and collectivism. Collectivism is seen as an unquestioned and organic trait of Pasifika people's essentialised identity, and practitioners refer to it to set themselves apart from Europeans and at the same time connect to their heritage. Maori are distinguished by their unquestioned indigenous status in New Zealand. In contrast with Maori and Europeans, Pasifika people are described as visitors, and the comparison further reinforces their liminal status. Thus, practitioners position themselves below the Maori and Europeans in the 'kiwi jungle'. While practitioners use the word 'visitor', they feel like outsiders both in New Zealand and in the Pacific Islands. Always standing out and never blending in, they feel like reverse chameleons.

### **9.1 What about the reverse chameleon then?**

At the beginning of the thesis, I wondered whether Pasifika theatre practitioners are in fact reverse chameleons, who always stand out. The multiplicity of identities and Pasifika people's liminal positioning in New Zealand support this hypothesis. Even for third-generation practitioners the differences are noticeable between Pasifika culture and the wider environment. However, doubtless because of increasing assimilation, moving between different environments has become more natural for this generation. Increasingly contemporary topics and the fading of the immediate impact of immigration also suggest that Pasifika people have assimilated more. The question then becomes: is the reverse chameleon changing and becoming more part of its environment?

From another perspective, while Pacific heritage and Pasifika ethnicity are considered to be of utmost importance, there is a move toward the dominant discourse. So, after all, is it the nature of the reverse chameleon to be like everyone else, to blend in? The use of popular culture and Western theatre conventions suggests that Pasifika theatre is somewhat like other theatre in New Zealand. But then again, the nature of this mimicry is also focused on reversal; it is equally important to use the likeness to their own needs, and to draw attention to injustices and power imbalances. The pressures between wanting to be a reverse chameleon and using the ability to blend in highlight tensions in the changing scene of Pasifika theatre.

Pasifika theatre is not just another post-colonial theatre: it is positioned in the triangle formed by three relationships of difference. These differences are based on power dynamics marked by colonisation, minority politics, and migration. While the existing literature on Pasifika theatre has identified migration as an important theme, Pasifika theatre was primarily described as post-colonial rather than migrant theatre. However, participants' primary identification is as 'migrants' and they emphasise their outsider and powerless position as well. The concept of mimicry could be applied to the combination of the three positions. One reason is the overlap of minority and migrant experiences with the post-colonial experience. Rather than simply branding it as post-colonial, the reality of Pasifika theatre practice is more accurately thought of as tripartite: post-colonial strands are fleshed out by ethnic and minority perspectives. Practitioners borrow elements from the dominant European culture, and adapt them to their own needs as they draw attention to social issues.

#### Contribution to knowledge

A primary contribution of the thesis is the compilation of a first Pasifika theatre history. The thesis has tracked the maturation of Pasifika theatre, which can be broadly characterised in four developmental stages. Pasifika theatre practitioners repeatedly describe their position outside the bicultural framework. Bi- and multiculturalism are sometimes seen to be targeting different discourses in New Zealand (Spoonley, 2005; Walker, 1995). While practitioners express dissatisfaction with government and funding bodies, funding is nevertheless allocated to Pasifika culture, for instance the Pasifika Festival, Banana Boat, and Creative New Zealand. The difference between practitioners' perceptions and aim of multicultural policies is visible, and echoes the dilemma of minorities' unsettled positions in New Zealand. Interestingly, practitioners position Pasifika people outside the bicultural framework, echoing Durie's view that recent migrants' cultures and languages should not be incorporated in policy-making and education, because these migrants are not among the founding nations of the country. The dilemma then is whether this is a reaction to or a description of the system, and whether it will eventually be followed by an attempt to gain equal insider status.

Pasifika theatre makers' identity construction exemplifies the processes of collective identity construction described by Taylor (V. Taylor & Whittier, 1992). The creation of boundaries from dominant European and indigenous Maori has led to a shared consciousness of difference. This difference results in practitioners' belief that Pasifika theatre's main goal is socio-political change, and both the difference and the collective identity are then intensified by targeting primarily Pasifika audiences.

There is little emphasis on traditional Pacific identities, in fact both practitioners' identities and Pasifika characters' identities are diversified and constructed. While post-colonial theorists, namely Fanon, Hall, and Crow, suggest that the essentialisation of identities plays a part in Pasifika identity construction, references to essentialised identities only came up in two instances. Comedy and oratory were considered natural for Pasifika people, and consequently practitioners claimed theatre as a continuation of Pacific oral traditions. Collectivism was regarded as an organic trait of Pasifika people and this essentialised identity was accepted. Diasporic communities are being discovered as a market, and diasporic audiences are identified in terms of their similarity to Pasifika people. Interestingly, audiences in the Pacific Islands are constructed on the basis of difference, which may mean that links to the homeland are weakening.

The discourse of Pasifika theatre is dominated by Pan-Pasifika ideas. Boundaries are rarely created along ethnic boundaries and instead focus primarily on the difference between Europeans, Maori and Pasifika people. While there is a growing diversification of ethnicities, the emphasis remains on Pasifika rather than Samoan or Tongan, which again shows that the primary difference is seen between Pasifika, Europeans and Maori.

Pasifika theatre may be seen as a form of self-determination. The mere visibility of practitioners in the public arena, where they can serve as role models and present narratives that are relevant to Pasifika people, is seen as a step toward self-determination. Additionally, reaching back to indigenous materials sets Pasifika theatre apart from other theatres in New Zealand. There is a difference between the international festival market (in which practitioners capitalise on Pasifika as exotic and New Zealand as a multicultural country) and diasporic markets (where practitioners' focus remains on migration, social issues and cultural references). As the importance of these markets grows, it may be that Pasifika theatre will split into two trends.

While languages are characteristically important for post-colonial theatre developments, Pasifika theatre has only just started to incorporate more Pacific languages. The use of Pacific languages is posited to be challenging because of the diversity of these languages, significant language loss, and the ethnic and generational diversity of audiences. It may also be that practitioners themselves do not have sufficient knowledge of Pacific languages. Works of the Western canon influenced Pasifika theatre, and were often used to show the difference between contexts in the early years, as expected in post-

colonial literatures. But newer works show a greater independence, moving away from Shakespeare and works from the Bible for example.

## **9.2 Limitations and recommendations**

This study operated under a social constructivist world-view, and accordingly it employed qualitative research methods. However, if time and resources had permitted, the study would have benefited from information gained through quantitative methods. In particular, more exact data on audiences would have allowed a more in-depth analysis of changes in audiences and theatre.

It would have been interesting to spend more time in the field, specifically to observe more rehearsals. While time limitations were a factor that restricted these observations, more importantly access was often denied. Potential participants also declined to give an interview, so for practitioners like Fuemana, Rodger, Fraser, and Ete I used earlier published interviews, reviews, biographies, plays, and performance archives to a greater extent. Thus the act of denial is interesting because it may be a sign of resistance toward research or outsiders. The implication of this dynamic for further studies problematises the identity of the researcher. Whether practitioners would have given significantly different answers to a fellow theatre practitioner or a researcher from a different ethnic background than my own is impossible to tell, but it is a valid question. The combination of Pasifika and social constructivist methodologies in the absence of exact guidelines for Pasifika methodologies also posed a challenge. While Pasifika research guidelines do not contradict Western methodologies, they are not specific enough, and even after consulting an advisor, I found the concept remained open to interpretation. One such idea is 'respect' (discussed in the ethics section): Pasifika notions of respect can be more limiting than in Western culture. The lack of exact expectations makes the guidelines difficult to apply in the absence of Pasifika authority.

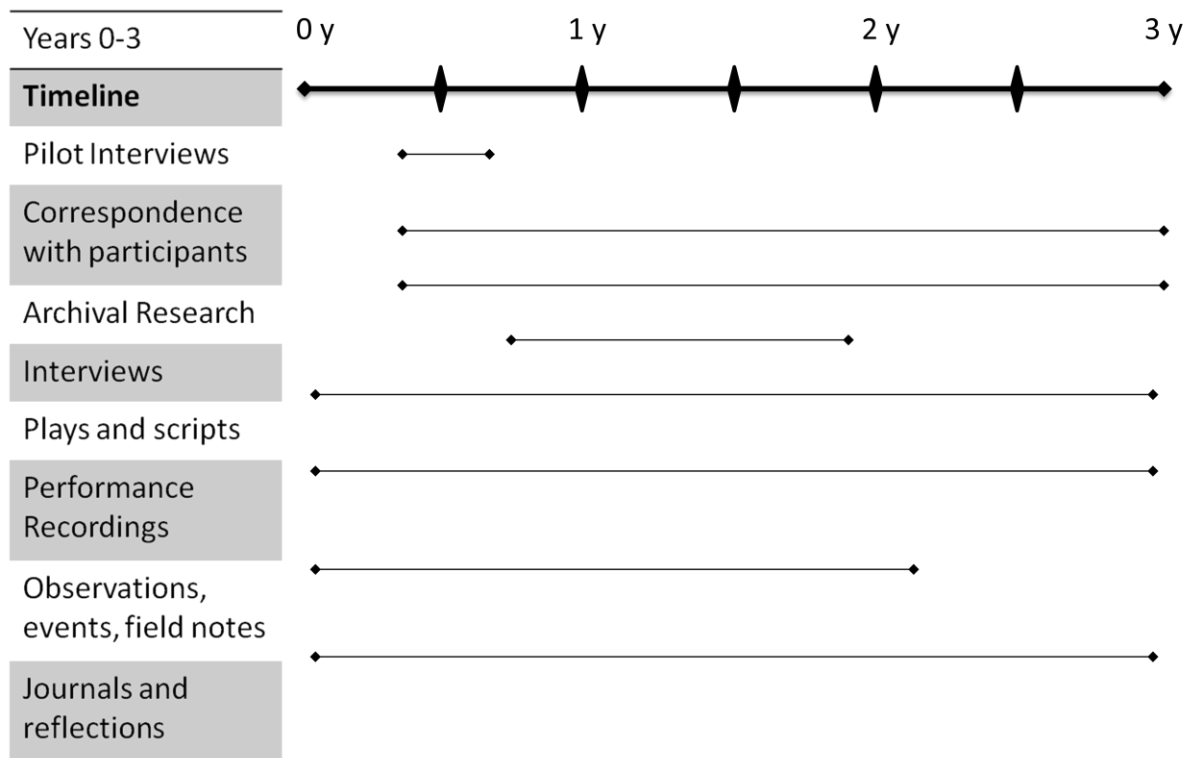
## **A reflection**

Three years ago, when I started this research, I knew little about Pasifika theatre. During my PhD studies, my academic skills were refined and I gained an understanding of theories which I had only encountered superficially before. I consider myself fortunate to have been able to learn about research ethics and indigenous research in New Zealand, which thanks to Maori scholars is a leader in its field. More importantly this research gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in a theatre which is often heart-wrenchingly funny and silly, and at other times imaginative and beautiful.

## Appendices

### 10.1 Appendix 1: Timeline of data collection

The data collection followed the following timeline, where 'Year 0' is 2009 June, and 'Year 3' is 2012 June, each smaller part signified 6 months:



## 10.2 Appendix 2: List of interviews used in the research and their abbreviations

### List of interviews

ANO1	Anonymous 1 (2010/04/20). [Interview with Anonymous1 Christchurch].
ANO2	Anonymous 2 (2010/06/20). [Interview with Anonymous 2, Auckland].
ANO3	Anonymous 3 (2010/05/06). [Interview with Anonymous 3, Christchurch].
AUM	Aumua, D. (2010/10/07). [Interview with Danny Aumua, Auckland].
AVI	Avia, T. (2010/06/30). [Interview with Tusiata Avia, Christchurch].
BEA	Beaton, H. (2010/06/08). [Interview with Hillary Beaton, Wellington].
CAR_L	Cardy, L. (2010/10/01). [Interview with Lynne Cardy, Auckland].
CAR_A	Carter, A. (2010/05/19, 19/05/2010). [Phone interview with Anton Carter].
CHA	Chandra, K. (2010/10/08). [Interview with Katrina Chandra, Auckland].
GIL	Gilbert, R. (2010/02/19). [Interview with Robert Gilbert, Aranui High School].
HEK	Heka, J. (2010/10/01). [Interview with Jenni Heka, Auckland].
IFO	Ifopo, E. (2010/06/09). [Interview with Erolia Ifopo, Wellington].
KIG	Kightley, O. (2010/06/24). [Interview with Oscar Kightley, Auckland].
LEE	Lees, N. (2010/09/29). [Interview with Nathaniel Lees, Wellington].
LEI	Leilua, S. (2010/10/09). [Interview with Stacey Leilua, Auckland].
LEO	Leota, S. (2010/09/29). [Interview with Salesi Leota, Wellington].
MAI	Maiava, O. (2010/10/06). [Interview with Ole Maiava, Auckland].
MAN	Manusaute, V. (2010/10/09). [Interview with Vela Manusaute, Auckland].
MAV	Mavaega, P. (2010/04/29). [Interview with Posenai Mavaega, Christchurch].
MUA_M	Muagututi'a, M. (2010/06/08). [Interview with Mishelle Muagututi'a, Wellington].
MUA_T	Muagututi'a, T. (2010/04/26). [Interview with Tanya Muagututi'a, Christchurch].
NAW	Nawalowalo, N. (2010/09/30). [Interview with Nina Nawalowalo, Wellington].
OCO	O'Connor, E. (2010/06/03). [Interview with Elisabeth O'Connor, Christchurch].
POL	Polataiavo, A. (2010/10/07). [Interview with Anapela Polataiavo, Auckland].
RIL	Riley, J. (2010/10/09). [Interview with Jonathan Riley, Auckland].

SCH	Schmidt, V. (2012/02/29). [Interview (email) Victoria Schmidt].
UNA	Unasa, L. (2010/10/19). [Phone interview with Leilani Unasa].
WAL	Walker, S. (2010/06/08). [Interview with Stephanie Walker, Wellington].
WEN	Wendt, A. (2010/10/05). [Interview with Albert Wendt, Auckland].

**10.2.1 Appendix 2.1: Additional Personal communication referenced in thesis (follow ups on interviews)**

CHA2	Chandra, K. (2011). [Email exchanges with Chandra]. Chandra, K. (2012). [Email exchanges with Chandra].
LEI2	Leilua, S. (2012). [Email exchanges Leilua].
MUA_M2	Muagututi'a, M. (2012). [Email exchanges with Mishelle Muagututi'a].
NAW2	Nawalowalo, N. (2011). [Email exchanges with Nawalowalo].

### 10.3 Appendix 3: List journal entries in thesis

Referenced as (Journal Entry, DATE, PLACE)

- I love the Islands [relief concert], Christchurch, 2009
- *Angels*, Court Theatre, Christchurch, 2009
- Tongan Church Fundraiser, Christchurch, 2009
- Pasifika Festival, Auckland, 2010
- Gallery Opening with Marylin Kohlhase, 2010
- The Laughing Samoans, *Best of the laughing Samoans*, Hamilton, 2010
- Pasifika Arts Fono, Auckland 2010
- Pacific Underground, *Matariki*, Christchurch, 2010
- Conversation with Coco Fusco, Belem, 2010
- Kila Kokonut Krew, Rehearsals, Auckland, 2010



#### 10.4 Appendix 4: Main question topics in semi-structured interviews

Note: This is the skeleton of the interview questions. Interviews were influenced by the answers practitioners gave, and by the list of plays, organisations, collaborations etc. that were made for each interview based on previous research.

1. Work in theatre
  - Specific play
  - Other examples
2. Other work (television, etc.)
3. How did you get involved/ get interested?
4. What were the highlights?
  - use probes!
5. What factors made it easier/ more difficult?
6. What are your experiences on/with...
  - Use list of productions!
  - Relevant organisations, collaborations , use list
7. Position of Pasifika arts/ theatre in New Zealand
8. What is the aim of theatre?
  - if participants talks about issues: what issues?
9. Work opportunities for Pasifika theatre practitioners
10. Influence of Pasifika values in your work
11. Change over time (industry and work)
12. Cultural Identity (what is it, what does it mean for you, how does it come up in your work)
13. Funding
14. Positioning Pasifika theatre
15. Relevance to local/ global/ New Zealand/ community → depending on answers

### 10.5 Appendix 5: Examples from journals

Note: Some of these journals were written in the dark of the theatre, or on busses and plains, hence the handwriting is sometimes scrawled.

met well. has  
good overview  
of things going  
on in NZ, and  
has strong views  
about future. also  
involved in our  
project. felt we  
got along and  
she was fairly  
honest. seemed  
to phase out and  
or rather just  
go on with  
about things,  
but were usually

### 10.5.1 Interview reflection

### 10.5.2 Observation Matariki (2010) by Pacific Underground

first there was a choir, with  
singing, I think in Maori.  
fairly upbeat.

presenter urges people to  
get soup and drink all  
other things.

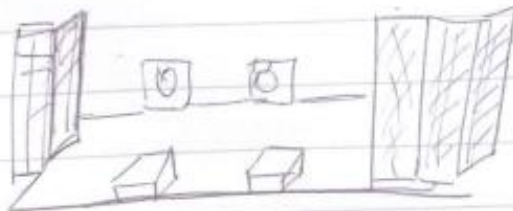
children are encouraged  
to get into centres

aware that the play  
will tell everything about  
Matariki that needs to be  
known.

in the break: hip-hop music.

Rangi and Mao's amazing Rar.

kids front of stage on floor  
very minimal sets.



10.5.3 Observation Laughing Samoans Greatest Hits (2010)

jokes about restaurant,  
like dinner h.t.  
I've been working  
hard for the last  
5 minutes, → blaud  
engaged  
on the rats or here.  
sit on table ok,  
mispronouncing things,  
now - for = 1 for,  
blaud engaged lady, and  
been,  
pragap - engam day  
people know what  
homicid go yes  
2 boys: mthia or

#### 10.5.4 Journal entry: Talking to a Maori and a Samoan security guard about New Zealand

the ambassador for the world. I questioned him: why?

He answered: look at us, a Maori, a Samoan and a European, chatting along. We are the most multi-cultural nation.

We talked none about these things and he was quite happy with speaking Maori 'being a trend', the Maori TV,

## 10.6 Appendix 6 Information letter<sup>52</sup>

College of Education

Kata Fulop

Tel: .:+64 3 364 2987 ext. 45595



Information Letter

for the study

‘How do Pasifika theatre practitioners perform and construct their identities’

date [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

As discussed in the telephone conversation, I ask you to participate in my PhD research, investigating ‘how do Pasifika theatre practitioners perform and construct their identities through theatre’.

The aim of this project is to explore how Pasifika theatre makers perform their cultural and ethnic identities in theatre and performance. I would like to explore how professional theatre makers think and reflect on the relationships of Pasifika cultural identity and performance.

My contact details are:

Kata Fulop, University of Canterbury

Tel +64 364 2987 ext. 45595 Email: kfu17@uclive.ac.nz

As discussed in the telephone conversation, I will have an interview with you, asking questions about your work, ideas on performance and how Pasifika identities and culture are relevant to your work and I ask you to give information and your own opinion within an approximately one hour long interview. As a follow-up to this investigation, you might be asked for a further interview.

---

<sup>52</sup> The information letter was updated during the study. The changes were: updating contact information and updating the research question, which became more precise in nature.

We also discussed verbally that if you wish, you can preserve your and your company's anonymity. If you wish the reporting on the interview to prevent public recognition of your identity, please indicate it on the bottom of the consent form. You have the option to choose a pseudonym in this case. If you wish to choose a pseudonym, please indicate it on the bottom of the form.

As we discussed on the phone, the interview will be audio-taped (for conditions see next paragraph). The transcripts of the interview will be available for you to read on request.

If you would like to read the initial analysis of the data and/or the chapters, please indicate in the bottom of the page. Your feedback will be incorporated in the data. As this material is collected for my PhD, which is a public document, it will be available via the University of Canterbury Library Database and some of it may be part of papers, publications and presentations arising from my PhD. The data (interview, audiotape) from the interview might be used in conference or published presentation.

All data will be securely stored in locked storage at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. Please also note that participation in the study is voluntary. If you do participate, you have the right to decline to answer any questions, and to withdraw from the study. Withdrawal of participation includes the withdrawal of information already provided.

If you have any questions about this research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisors.

- Janinka Greenwood, Associate Professor, University of Canterbury, +64 364 2987 ext 44390
- Alan Scott, Principal Lecturer, University of Canterbury, +64 364 2987 ext 44286

They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

Issues of cultural knowledge and support have been discussed with Amosa Fa'afoi, a Pasifika lecturer at the College of Education who is giving guidance in this area.

The study has approval from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Complaints may be addressed to:

Dr Michael Grimshaw, Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee

University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,  
Kata Fulop



## 10.7 Appendix 7: Consent form

Consent Form

Researcher: Kata Fulop

### **‘How do Pasifika theatre practitioners perform and construct their identities’**

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis I agree to participate as a subject in the project, and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved.

I agree to be audio-taped during the interview.

I understand also that my participation is voluntary, and I may at any time withdraw. If I choose to be shown the initial analysis of the data from our interview, I will have the opportunity to give further input.

I note that the project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

NAME (please print): XXXXXXXXXX

☐

I want to be anonymous.

☐

I do not want to be anonymous

☐

I wish to use a pseudonym.

(Please state the name that is to be used):.....

☐

I would like to read the transcript of the interview.

☐

I would like to read the initial analysis and the chapters.

Signature:

Date:

## 10.8 Appendix 8: Feedback from practitioners, examples

### Template of letter

(which then was individualised based on attachments, information needed and relationship with practitioner)

Dear [redacted],

Some time ago now I interviewed you for my thesis on Pasifika theatre. Sorry for contacting you unexpectedly late, but my thesis slowed down significantly due to the earthquakes in Christchurch as I lost a lot of data. You indicated on the consent form that you would like to read some of the writing, and your feedback would be very welcome.

In this attachment, I do not send you the entire thesis, but ask you instead to comment on the 'stories' in the history chapter that are relevant to your work (see attached).

The aim of the history chapter is to outline the work of Pasifika theatre companies and theatre practitioners. Other parts of your interview were incorporated in the analysis sections. Please feel free to comment on any inaccuracies, if you agree or disagree with any of the statements. These stories are relatively short (a paragraph to a two pages depending on the company/practitioner and available information).

Additional comments on the process, the stories or your thoughts on Pasifika theatre and identity are also welcome.

Thank you for your help and looking forward to hear from you,  
Kata

### Replies

#### Example 1

Hi Kata

Of course I remember! Good to hear from you again :) I will get on to this and send back to you - hope you are well!

#### Example 3

Hi Kata

All looks good to me! :)

## Example 2

Thanks Kata,

I think the only thing it might be worth considering analysing in addition is that *On A Different Shelf* is one of what I would say is the new wave of second-generation Pacific stories.

The first wave of Pacific plays may be categorised as 'migrational', in terms of 'looking back' to the 'home' island and comparison of environments and traditions (mainly unfavourable with regards to holding onto Pacific traditions in the face of Western 'civilization').

The newer works, coming in over the past 4 years are tending to be the voices of the children from the migrational period - those now encountering their own new issues of having acculturated into the Western traditions and having some loss of Pacific identity, as well as including the more contemporary Western concerns usually associated with Western ideologies (consumerism, technology, gender politics etc).

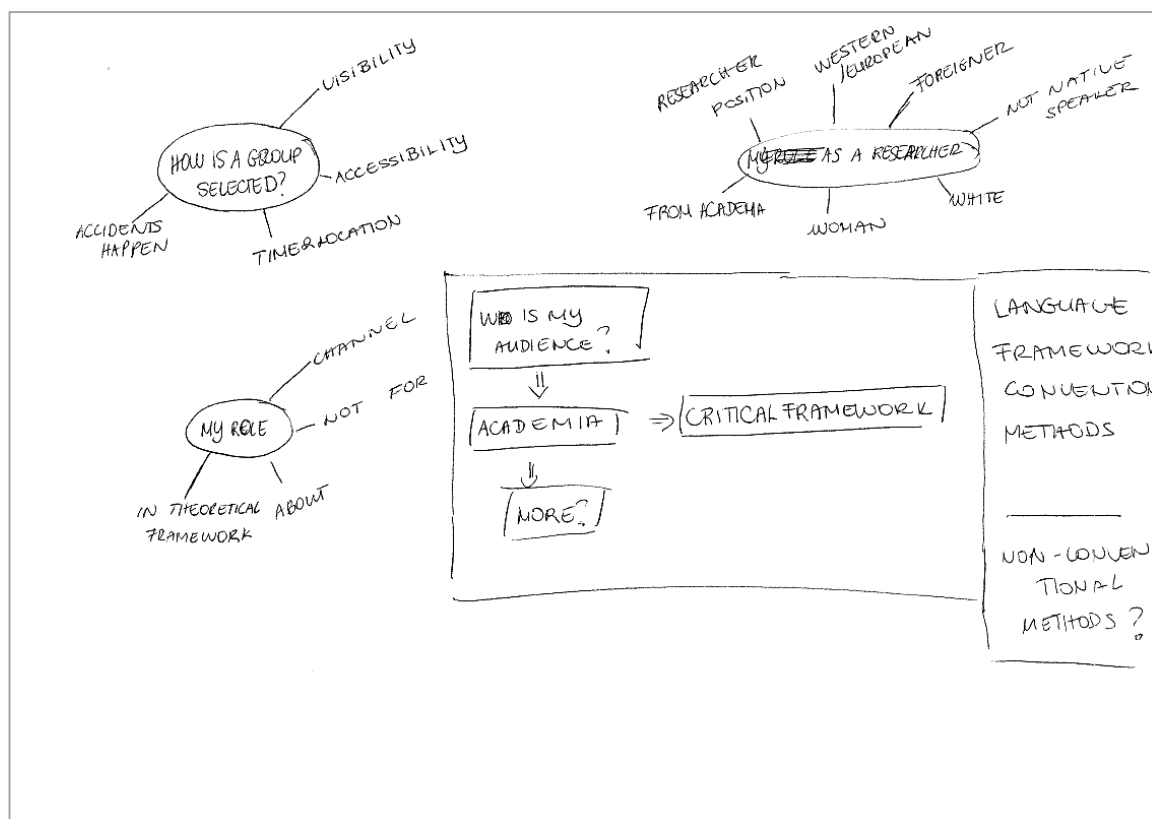
Hope this helps!

Are you coming back here again before you finish your thesis?

Cheers, x

## 10.9 Appendix 9: Examples of mind maps and analysis process

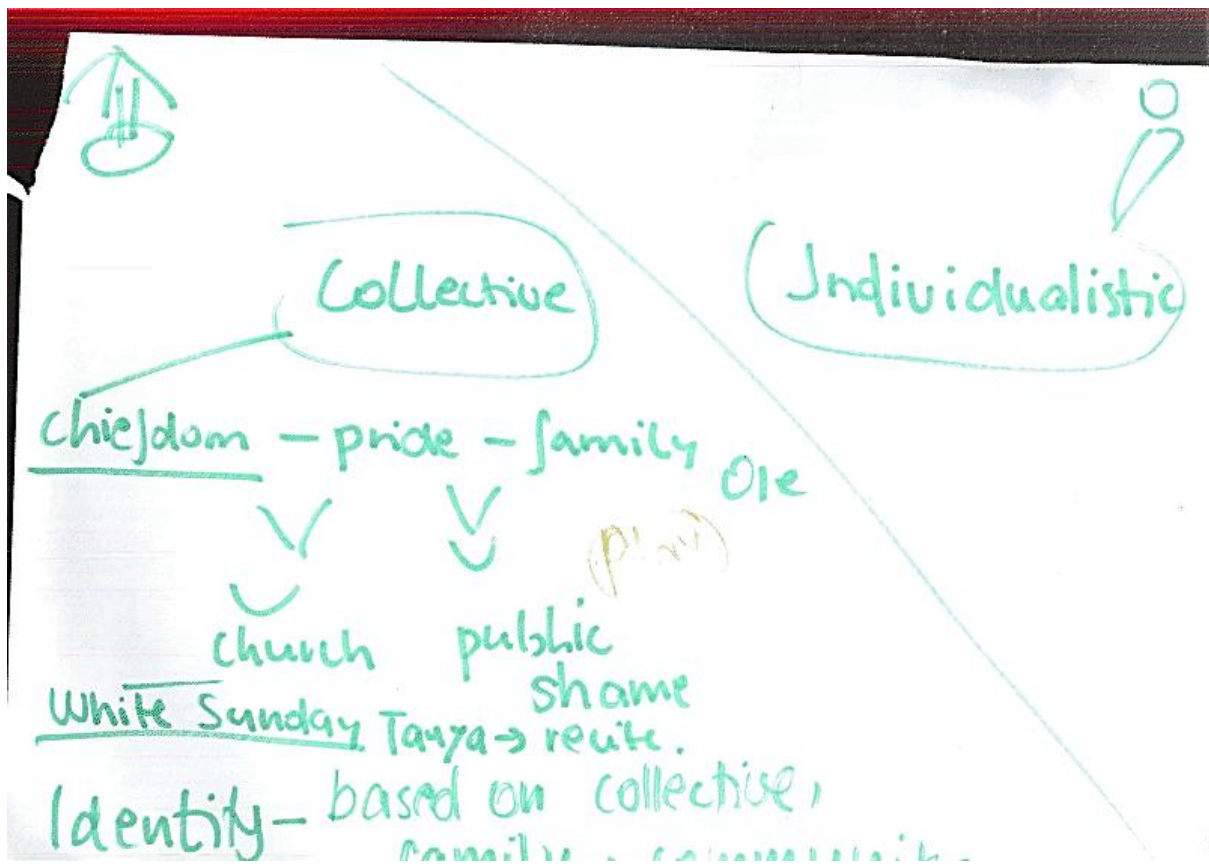
### 10.9.1 On identity of researcher



### 10.9.2 Evolving topics



### 10.9.3 Collectivism and individualism



## 10.10 Appendix 10: Human ethics approval



### HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Lynda Griffioen  
Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

Ref: HEC 2009/177

17 February 2010

Kata Fulop  
PhD Student  
College of Education  
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Kata

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal "How Pasifika Immigrants in New Zealand perform their cultural identity" has been considered and approved.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 16 February 2010.

Best wishes for your project.

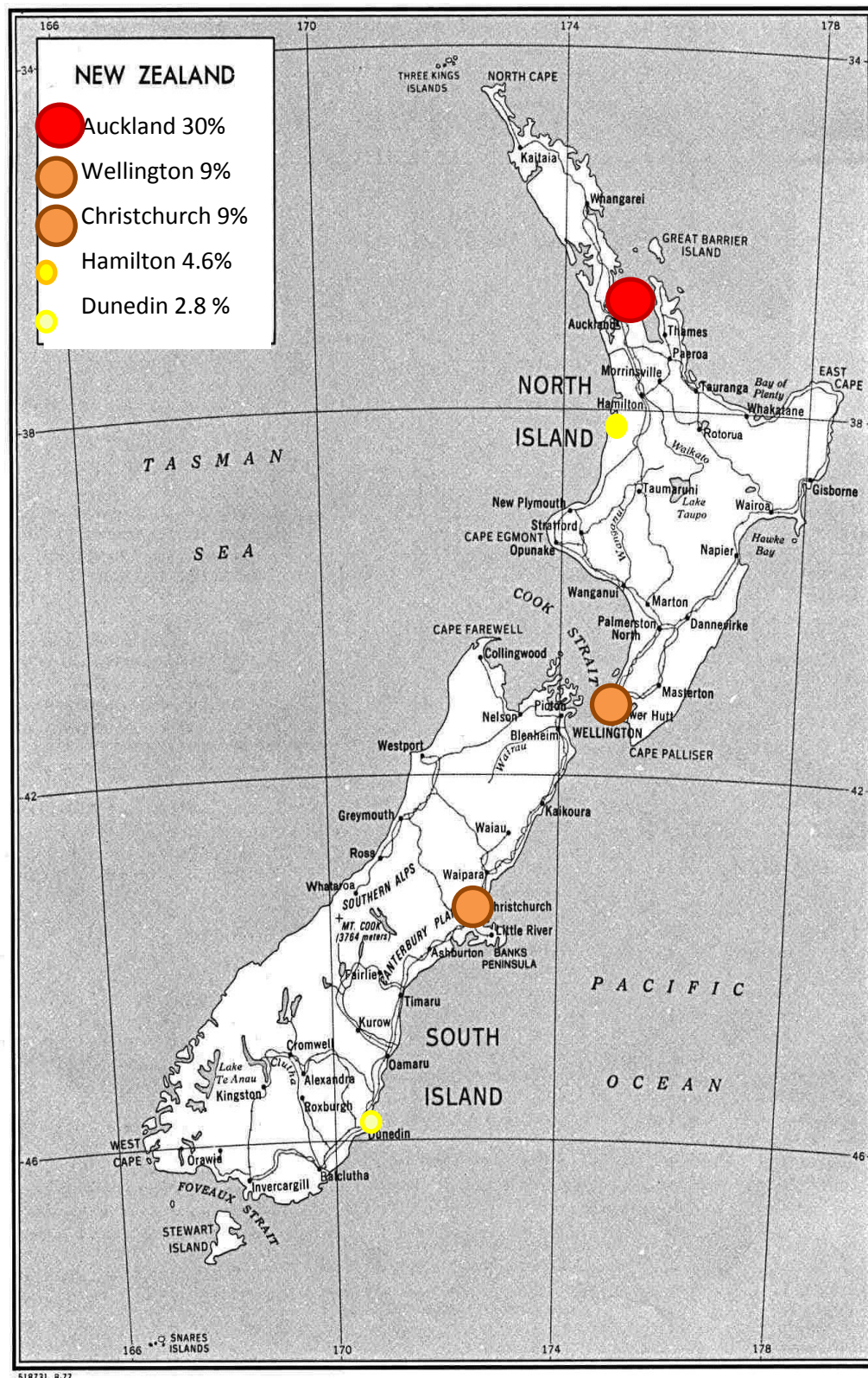
Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Grimshaw'.

Michael Grimshaw  
**Chair**  
*University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee*



## 10.11 Appendix 11: Geographical distribution of Pasifika people in New Zealand



# Urban/rural distribution of Pacific ethnic groups

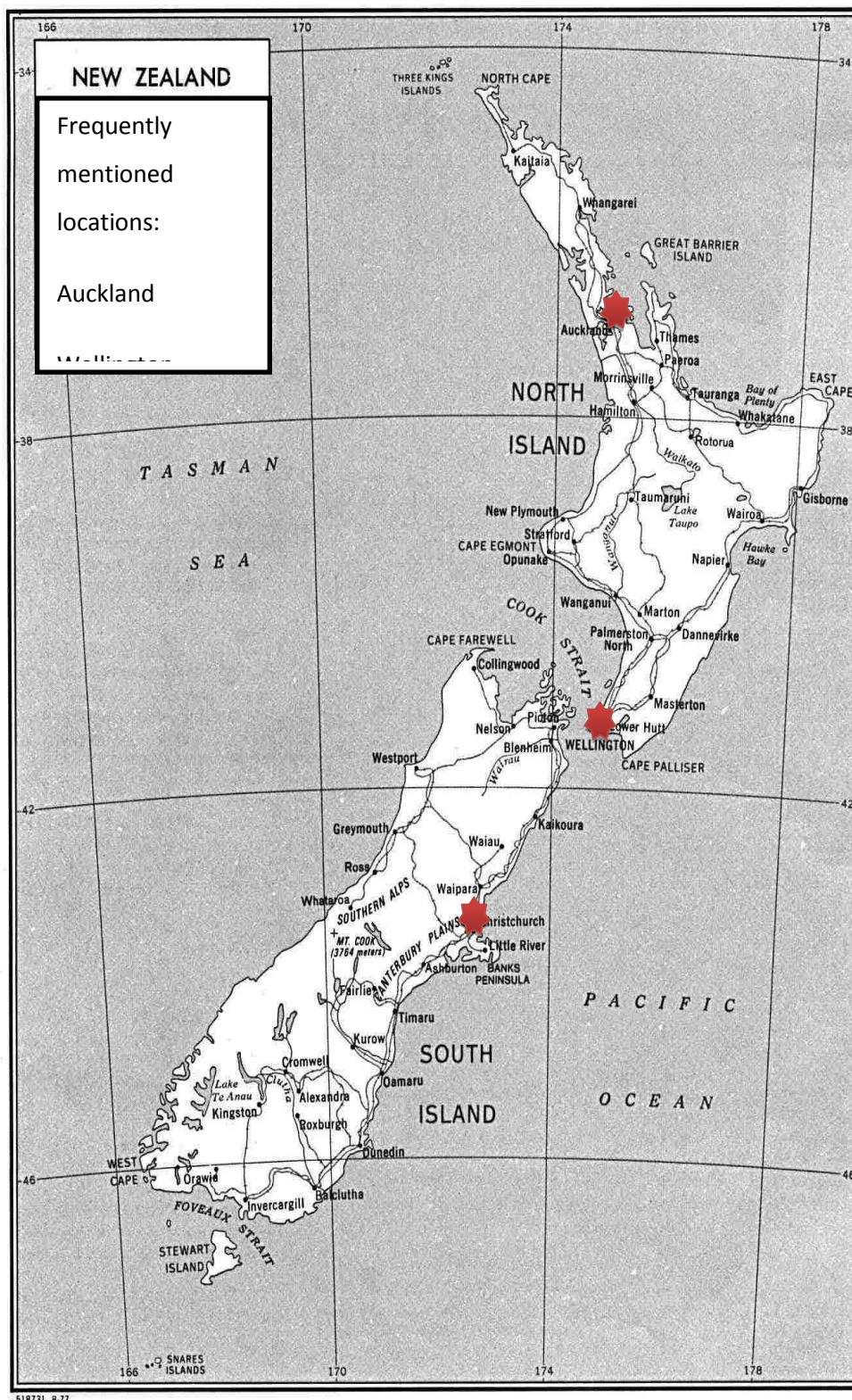
2006

Usual residence	Samoa	Cook Islands	Tongan	Niuean	Tokelauan	Fijian	Total Pacific	Total NZ
	Percent							
Auckland urban area	66.4	58.8	78.1	77.1	26.5	57.7	65.8	30
Hamilton urban area	1.7	2.5	2.4	2.3	0.8	4.1	2.2	4.6
Wellington urban area	15.7	11.1	4.3	6	49.7	9.5	12.4	9
Christchurch urban area	4.7	2.5	2.1	2.2	1.4	4.6	3.6	9
Dunedin urban area	0.8	1.3	0.8	0.5	1.2	1.3	0.9	2.8
Other main urban areas	5.6	10.7	5.5	4.6	11.5	10.8	7.1	16.6
Total main urban areas	94.9	86.7	93.2	92.7	91.1	88	92	71.8
Secondary urban areas	1.8	5.5	2.7	1.8	5.4	3.3	2.9	6
Minor urban areas	1.6	3.9	2.2	2.5	1.7	4	2.5	8.1
Total urban	98.3	96.1	98.1	97.1	98.2	95.3	97.5	86
Rural centres	0.3	0.9	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.8	0.5	2
Other rural areas	1.4	3	1.5	2.4	1.5	3.9	2	12
Total rural	1.7	3.9	1.9	2.9	1.8	4.7	2.5	14
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Zealand, S. N. (2006). Pacific Peoples Geographical Distribution 2006 census.



## 10.12 Appendix 12: Location and timeline of frequently mentioned Pasifika theatre companies



Theatre companies by location and time of establishment

Auckland

Statement Theatre  
(1970s)

Pacific Theatre (1987)

The Brownies (around  
1996)

Naked Samoans  
(1997)

Kila Kokonut Krew  
(2003)

Electric Koko Zoids  
(2008)

Pani and Pani (2010)

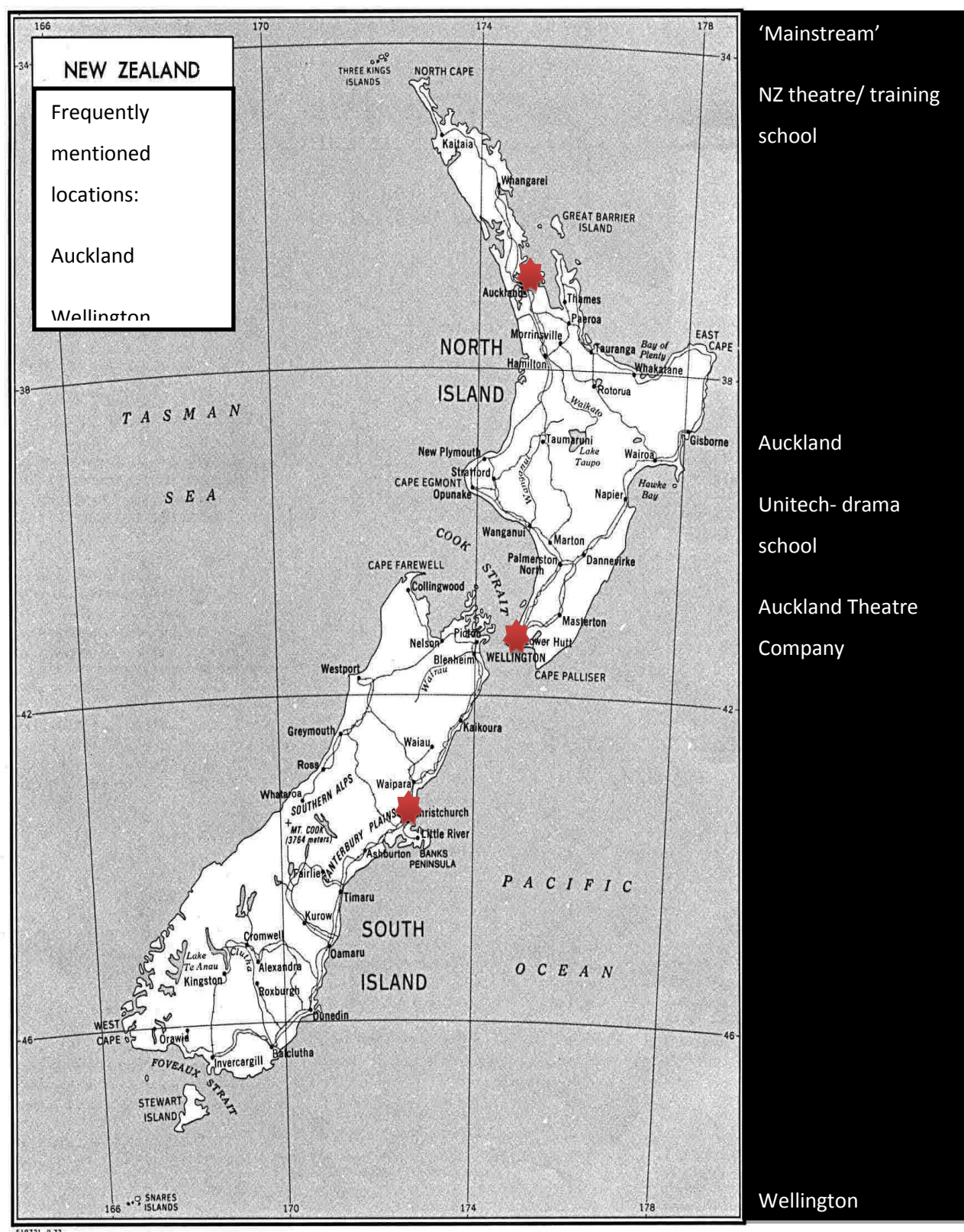
Wellington

Taotahi ma Uo (1981)

The Laughing  
Samoans (2003)



## 10.13 Appendix 13: Location of mainstream New Zealand theatres and training schools



#### 10.14 Appendix 14: Table of frequently mentioned plays

Title	Year	Writer, company, director	Location
Le Matau	1984	W: Samson Samasoni and Stephen Sinclair C: Taotahi ma Uo	Wellington
Feiva/Favour	1987	C: Pacific Theatre D: Justine Simei Barton	Auckland
Othello		C: Pacific Theatre D: Justine Simei Barton	Auckland
Romeo and Juliet	1992	C: Pacific Theatre D: Justine Simei Barton and Alan Brunton	Auckland
Lupe and Sina: A Love Story With Cannibals	1990	C: Pacific Theatre D: Justine Simei Barton, dramaturg Edmund Murray	Auckland
The Johnny Smith Myth	1991	W, D: Etetuai Ete	Wellington
Lena	2007	W: Jason Greenwood D: Justine Simei Barton	
The Waitara Purchase	1989	W: Brian Hannam C: Whakarite Theatre Company D: Robert Gilbert	Christchurch
Think of a Garden	1997	W: John Kneubuhl C: Auckland Theatre Company	Auckland
Horizons	1992	W: Frances Serra C: Whakarite Theatre Company D: Robert Gilbert	Christchurch
Fresh off the Boat	1993	W: Oscar Kightley and Simon Small C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
Gifted and Fresh	1993	W: Oscar Kightley and Simon Small C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
Who's The Flavour?	1994	W: Oscar Kightley C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
Absolutely fabulous	1995	W: Victor Rodger C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
Room 7	1997-8	C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
Cat Girls		C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
Will and Ted's Excellent adventure		C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
and Will and Ted's Bogus journey		C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
Matariki	2010	C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
Nathan's nightmare	1999-2000	C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
A Frigate Bird Sings	1995	W: Oscar Kightley and Dave Fane C: Pacific Underground D: Nathaniel Lees Producer: Makerita Urale	Wellington

Tatau: Rites of Passage	1996	C: Zeal Company and Pacific Underground	
Dawn Raids	1997	W: Oscar Kightley C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
Romeo and Tusi	1997	W: Oscar Kightley and Erolia Ifopo C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
Island Summer (2004)	2004	W: Pos Mavaega C: Pacific Underground	Christchurch
Angels	2009	W: Joy Vaele and Tanya Muagututi'a C: Pacific Underground and Court Theatre D: Robert Gilbert	Christchurch
The Naked Samoans talk about their knives (1998)	1998	The Naked Samoans	Auckland
Niu Sila	2004	W: Oscar Kightley and Dave Armstrong	Wellington
Taro King	2002	W and D: Vela Manusaute C: Kila Kokonut Krew and Auckland Theatre Company	Auckland
Playaz Night	2005	C: Kila Kokonut Krew	Auckland
Super Fresh	2008	C: Kila Kokonut Krew	Auckland
Once were Samoans	2006	C: Kila Kokonut Krew	Auckland
We can't pay we will not pay	2010	W: Dario Fo C: Kila Kokonut Krew and Auckland Theatre Company D: Vela Manusaute	Auckland
Kingdom of Lote	2010	W: Suli Moa C: Kila Kokonut Krew / Young Kila Writers/	Auckland
Four Women	2010	W: Leilani Salesa C: Kila Kokonut Krew / Young Kila Writers/	Auckland
Strictly Brown	2009	C: Kila Kokonut Krew	Auckland
Laughing With Samoans	2003	W and D: Eteuati Ete, Tofiga Fepulea'i and James Nokice C: Laughing Samoans	
<i>A Small Samoan Wedding</i>	2004	W and D: Eteuati Ete and Tofiga Fepulea'i C: Laughing Samoans	
<i>Old School</i>	2005	W and D: Eteuati Ete and Tofiga Fepulea'i C: Laughing Samoans	
<i>Off Work</i>	2006	W and D: Eteuati Ete and Tofiga Fepulea'i C: Laughing Samoans	
<i>Crack Me Off</i>	2008	W and D: Eteuati Ete and Tofiga Fepulea'i C: Laughing Samoans	

<i>Prettyfull Woman</i>	2009	W and D: Eteuati Ete and Tofiga Fepulea'i C: Laughing Samoans	
<i>Greatest Hits</i>	2010	W and D: Eteuati Ete and Tofiga Fepulea'i C: Laughing Samoans	
The Songmaker's Chair	2003	W: Albert Wendt C: Auckland Theatre Company D: Nathaniel Lees	Auckland
Bare	1998	W: Toa Fraser	Auckland
No. 2	1999	W: Toa Fraser	Auckland
Paradise	2001	W: Toa Fraser	Auckland
Sons	1995	W: Victor Rodger C: Court theatre	Christchurch
Cunning stunts	1997	W: Victor Rodger C: BATS	Wellington
<i>Ranterstantrum</i> (2002)	2002	W: Victor Rodger	Auckland
<i>My Name is Gary Cooper</i>	2007	W: Victor Rodger C: Auckland Theatre Company	Auckland
Music and me (2012) by	2012	W: Victoria Schmidt	Auckland
Tautai	2012	W: Iaheto Ah Hi D: Oscar Kightley	Auckland
South Pacific Games	2008	C: Electric Koko Zoids	Auckland
E.K.Z.TV		C: Electric Koko Zoids	Auckland
Frangipani Perfume	1998	W: Makerita Urale C: BATS D: Erolia Ifopo	Wellington
Mapaki	1999	W: Diana Fuemana C: BATS	Wellington
Jingle Bells	2001	W: Diana Fuemana	
The Packer	2008	W: Diana Fuemana	Wellington
My Mother Dreaming	2005	W: Diana Fuemana	
Falemalama	2008	W: Diana Fuemana	Minneapolis
Vula	2005	W: Nina Nawalowalo	Wellington
Conchus Season	2009	D: Nina Nawalowalo C: Conch	Wellington
<i>Yalewa</i>	2009	W: Kasaya Manulevu D: Nina Nawalowalo C: Conch	Wellington
<i>Te Puea Some Things Can't Be Healed by Bandages</i>	2009	W: <i>Princess Te Puea</i> Whioke D: Nina Nawalowalo C: Conch	Wellington
<i>Te Mahara —The Memory</i>	2009	W: Kristyl Noho D: Nina Nawalowalo C: Conch	Wellington
Tautala	2003	W: Leilani Unasa	Wellington
His Mother's Son	2007	W: Leilani Unasa	Wellington
U got Bush	2009	W: Leilani Unasa, Maraea Rakuraku and Fiona Truelove	Wellington

On a Different Shelf	2008	W: Sandra Kailahi D: Katrina Chandra	Auckland
Wild Dogs Under my Skirt	2002	W: Tusiata Avia	
<i>Phat</i> Chix in the Settee	2010	W: Anapela Polataivao and Goretti Chadwick C: Pani and Pani	Auckland



## 10.15 Appendix 15: short biographies of frequently mentioned theatre practitioners

NAME (i)= interviewed	Short Biography or Role
<b>Samson Samasoni</b>	Journalist of Samoan descent, co-writer of <i>Le Matou</i> , one of the first Pasifika plays.
<b>Stephen Sinclair</b>	Co-writer of <i>Le Matou</i> , one of the first Pasifika plays. His other works focus on Maori issues ( <i>Caramel Cream</i> ), social inequalities ( <i>Ladies' Night</i> ), and history ( <i>The Bellbird</i> ). Especially in the 1980s he wrote plays and films that explore the boundaries of political correctness, most notably with Peter Jackson ( <i>Braindead</i> , 1992).
<b>Justine Simeai Barton</b>	Founder of the first Pacific theatre company, Pacific Theatre (Auckland). Pacific theatre, operating in a largely monocultural environment in the 1980s and early 1990s, produced plays including <i>Feiva/Favour</i> , <i>Othello</i> , <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , and <i>Lupe and Sina: A Love Story With Cannibals</i> . While Simeai Barton later focused more on film than theatre, she directed <i>Lena</i> by Jason Greenwood.
<b>Edmund Murray</b>	Auckland-based theatre practitioner, playwright and academic. In this thesis he is mentioned with regard his involvement with Pacific Theatre ( <i>Lupe and Sina: A Love Story With Cannibals</i> , 1990). He is currently associate professor at Auckland University's English Department.
<b>Etetuai Ete</b>	Founding member of the Laughing Samoans, a popular Pasifika comedy duo. He trained with Pacific Theatre, and devised and performed the first Pasifika solo show, <i>The Johnny Smith Myth</i> . Since 2003, when the Laughing Samoans was established, they produced successful touring productions yearly including: <i>Laughing With Samoans</i> (2003), <i>A Small Samoan Wedding</i> (2004), <i>Old School</i> (2005), <i>Off Work</i> (2006), <i>Crack Me Off</i> (2008), <i>Prettyfull Woman</i> (2009), <i>Greatest Hits</i> (2010).
<b>Jason Greenwood</b>	Playwright. His historical play, <i>Lena</i> (2007), was directed by Justine Simeai Barton.
<b>Robert Gilbert (i)</b>	Theatre director. He was involved with the set up and running of Whakarite Theatre Company, which aimed to provide drama education for Pasifika and Maori youth. He directed numerous plays, including <i>Waitara Ridges</i> and <i>Horizons</i> . Most recently, he directed <i>Angels</i> (2009) at Court Theatre, a play written by Pacific Underground members Joy Vaele and Tanya Muagututi'a.
<b>John Kneubuhl</b>	American Samoan playwright, screenwriter and historian. His plays explore Samoan culture and identity. His plays include <i>The Harp in the Willows</i> (1946), <i>This City Is Haunted</i> (1947), <i>Mele Kanikau: A Pageant</i> , and <i>A Play: A Play</i> . His last play, <i>Think of a Garden</i> (1992) premiered in New Zealand, and was the first Pacific play performed in a professional theatre.
<b>Oscar Kightley (i)</b>	Actor, playwright, director, producer of Samoan descent. He was member of Pacific Underground and The Naked Samoans. He co-wrote <i>Fresh off the Boat</i> (1993), <i>A Frigate Bird Sings</i> (1996), <i>Dawn Raids</i> (1997), and <i>Niu Sila</i> (2004). He supports young talent and directed <i>Tautai</i> (2012) by Iaheto Ah Hi. His television and film work is well known, including <i>Bro'Town</i> , Sione's wedding.
<b>Simon Small</b>	Founding member of Pacific Underground, Christchurch based theatre company. In the 1990s, he co-wrote pioneering Pasifika plays with Oscar Kightley, such as <i>Fresh off the Boat</i> and <i>Gifted and Fresh</i> .
<b>Victor Rodger</b>	Playwright, scriptwriter, and journalist of Samoan heritage. His plays include <i>Sons</i> , <i>Absolutely Fobulous</i> , <i>Cunning Stunts</i> , <i>Ranterstantrum</i> , and <i>My Name is Gary Cooper</i> . His work deals with race, gender and culture and they have been staged in New Zealand largest theatre companies. He won numerous awards (four Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards, 2006 Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writers' Residency, and the 2009 Ursula Bethell Creative Writing Residency).
<b>Albert Wendt (i)</b>	Samoan poet and writer. His seminal work <i>Towards a New Oceania</i> called for a revival of Pacific arts. His novels and poetry, including <i>Leaves of the Banyan Tree</i> (1979), influences Pacific literature to this date. His only play to this date <i>The</i>

	<i>Songmaker's Chair</i> (2003), which was one of the first Pasifika plays that was performed in a major European theatre.
<b>Nathaniel Lees (i)</b>	Actor, director, playwright of Samoan descent. He was one of the first Samoan actors in New Zealand. He started his own educational theatre company Statement Theatre in the 1970s, which toured schools in New Zealand. He then moved on to directing and acting, his credits include but are not limited to: <i>The Songmaker's Chair</i> by Albert Wend, John Kneubuhl's <i>Think of a Garden A Frigate Bird Sings</i> by Kightley and Fane. He also starred in a number of Hollywood productions including Xena, Matrix and the Lord of the Rings.
<b>Ole Maiava (i)</b>	Ole Maiava, poet, playwright and festival organiser is a member of the Banana Boat Writers Group. He describes himself as a forty-third generation Samoan and first generation New Zealander. His short radio play, <i>Skin Deep</i> (2011), explores the issue of upbringing and culture.
<b>Erolia Ifopo (i)</b>	Actress, director and playwright. She was member of Pacific Underground, Christchurch based theatre company, and co-wrote <i>Romeo and Tusi</i> (1997), which became a national success. She also directed <i>Frangipani Perfume</i> (1998), directed by Makerita Urale and worked with the Laughing Samoans.
<b>Joy Vaele</b>	Actress and playwright of Samoan descent. She was member of Pacific Underground, Christchurch based theatre company, and co-wrote <i>Angels. Angels</i> (2010) was one of the first Pasifika plays about women by women.
<b>Tanya Muagituti'a (i)</b>	Actress, festival organiser, and playwright of Samoan descent. She was a member of Pacific Underground, Christchurch based theatre company, and co-wrote <i>Angels. Angels</i> (2010) was one of the first Pasifika plays about women by women. She also took part in organising the annual Pasifika festival in Christchurch and in Auckland.
<b>Michelle Muagituti'a (i)</b>	Samoan actress and dancer. She was a member of Pacific Underground, Christchurch based theatre company, and acted in their early shows.
<b>Toa Fraser</b>	Fijian-English playwright and screenwriter. His plays are <i>Bare</i> (1998), <i>No. 2</i> (1999), and <i>Paradise</i> (2001). His works deal with intercultural and intergenerational conflict in urban New Zealand.
<b>Leilani Unasa (i)</b>	Wellington based playwright, whose plays include: <i>Tautala</i> (2003), <i>His Mothers' Son</i> (2007), and <i>You got bush</i> .
<b>Anapela Polataiavo (i)</b>	Actress of Samoan descent, founder of Auckland based theatre company, Kila Kokonut Krew (2003) and female comedy duo Pani and Pani (2010).
<b>Vela Manusaute (i)</b>	Actor, playwright and director from Samoan heritage, founder of comedy duo the Brownies and Auckland based theatre company, Kila Kokonut Krew (2003).
<b>Dave Fane</b>	Actor and playwright, member of Christchurch based theatre group Pacific Underground and founder of comedy troupe, The Naked Samoans. He co-wrote <i>A Frigate Bird Sings</i> (1995) with Oscar Kightley. His other theatre credits include <i>Niu Sila</i> , <i>Fresh Off The Boat</i> , <i>Ladies Night</i> , <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> , <i>Serial Killers</i> , and <i>Sons</i> .
<b>Makerita Urale</b>	Playwright, documentary director and producer. Her play, <i>Frangipani Perfume</i> (1998), is the first Pasifika play written by a woman for an all female cast. She produced <i>A Frigate Bird Sings</i> (1996), <i>Ricordi</i> (1996), <i>Beauty and the Beast</i> (1998), <i>Classical Polynesia</i> (1998), <i>The Debate</i> (1995), <i>Duty Free</i> (1998), <i>Two Days in Dream</i> (2003), <i>Sex with Strangers</i> (2004), <i>Paradise</i> (2003).
<b>Anton Carter (i)</b>	Playwright, actor and Senior Programmes Adviser, Pacific Arts at Creative New Zealand. He was a member of Christchurch based theatre company, Pacific Underground. He was heavily involved in the production of <i>Tatau</i> (1996) Pacific Underground's collaboration with Zeal Theatre, an Australian theatre company.
<b>Suli Moa</b>	Suli Moa is an Auckland based emerging playwright of Tongan descent. He was involved in the Young Kila Playwrights programme, run by Kila Kokonut Krew. His first play, <i>Kingdom of Lote</i> (2010) was the first Tongan play in New Zealand. His second play, <i>The Heart's Path</i> was performed in 2012.



<b>Leilani Salesa</b>	Auckland based playwright of Samoan- European descent. She was involved in the Young Kila Playwrights programme, run by Kila Kokonut Krew. From this collaboration emerged, <i>Four women</i> (2010), her first play.
<b>Tofiga Fepulea’i</b>	Actor of Samoan descent, member of The Laughing Samoans.
<b>James Nokice</b>	Actor, comedian. Performed and produced <i>Laughing with the Samoans</i> (2003) with Tofiga Fepulea’i and Ete Eteuati, but left the trio after the show.
<b>Victoria Schmidt (i)</b>	Auckland based playwright and actress. Her first play, <i>Music and Me</i> (2012) was a combination of pop culture references and urban Pasifika culture. She was also involved in <i>Sione’s Wedding</i> , <i>Running With The Bulls</i> , <i>Othello Polynesia</i> , <i>Tautai</i> , <i>The Factory</i> .
<b>Iaheto Ah Hi</b>	Playwright and actor. He wrote the first Tokelauan play, <i>Tautai</i> , directed by Oscar Kightley. He also acted in: <i>Sione’s Wedding</i> , <i>The Market</i> , <i>Matariki</i> , <i>Running With the Bulls</i> , <i>Tautai</i> . <i>Sione’s 2: Unfinished Business</i> .
<b>Diana Fuemana</b>	Playwright and actress from Niuean descent. She was one of the first Pasifika women playwrights to emerge in the New Zealand theatre scene. Her plays include: <i>Mapaki</i> (1999), <i>Jingle Bells</i> (2001), <i>The Packer</i> (2008), <i>My Mother Dreaming</i> (2005), and <i>Falemalama</i> (2008).
<b>Nina Nawalowalo (i)</b>	Playwright and theatre professional from Fijian descent. She spent most of her professional career in Europe, but since her return to New Zealand she devised <i>Vula</i> (2005), one of the most formally innovative pieces in New Zealand theatre. She also established her own company, <i>The Conch</i> , which helps young Pasifika and Maori women practitioners to perform their work.
<i>Princess Te Puea</i> <b>Whioke</b>	Playwright. She devised a piece titled <i>Te Puea -Some Things Can’t Be Healed by Bandages</i> (2009) in the Conchus Season, a production run by Nina Nawalowalo to support young Pasifika and Maori playwrights.
<b>Kristyl Noho</b>	Playwright. She devised a piece titled <i>Te Mahara —The Memory</i> (2009) in the Conchus Season, a production run by Nina Nawalowalo to support young Pasifika and Maori playwrights
<b>Sandra Kailahi</b>	Playwright. Her play, <i>On a different shelf</i> (2008), explores Pasifika women’s experiences in their thirties, and was directed by Katrina Chandra.
<b>Kasaya Manulevu</b>	Playwright. She devised a piece titled <i>Yalewa</i> (2009) in the Conchus Season, a production run by Nina Nawalowalo to support young Pasifika and Maori playwrights.
<b>Tusiata Avia (i)</b>	She is a performance poet and actress of Samoan descent. Her first show was <i>Wild Dogs Under my Skirt</i> (2002). She was one of the main female characters in Nina Nawalowalo’s show, <i>Vula</i> (2005)
<b>Goretti Chadwick</b>	Actress and comedian. She is a member of Kila Kokonut Krew and Pani and Pani.
<b>Helen Jarroe</b>	Director. Founder of Pasifika-Maori theatre company, Taotahi ma Uo.
<b>Canada Alofa McCarthy</b>	Comedian. He was founding member of The Brownies, a Pasifika comedy duo.
<b>Mario Gaoa</b>	Comedian and actor of Samoan descent. He is member of the comedy troupe, The Naked Samoans.
<b>Shimpal Lelisi</b>	Comedian and actor of Niuean descent. He is member of the comedy troupe, The Naked Samoans.
<b>Robbie Magasiva</b>	Comedian and actor of Samoan descent. He is member of the comedy troupe, The Naked Samoans. He also played the main character, Gary, in Victor Rodger’s critically acclaimed play, <i>My name is Gary Cooper</i> (2007).
<b>Jerome Leota</b>	Comedian and actor of Samoan descent. He is member of the comedy troupe, The Naked Samoans.
<b>Danny Aumua</b>	Emerging actor and playwright. He is founding member of Elektro Koko Zoids, Auckland based comedy troupe.

<b>Stephanie Walker (i)</b>	<b>10.15.1 Programme Manager &amp; co-General Manager at BATS, Wellington.</b>
<b>Hillary Beaton (i)</b>	Director and CEO of Downstage, Wellington.
<b>Lynne Cardy (i)</b>	Associate director of Auckland Theatre Company.
<b>Katrina Chandra (i)</b>	Director and producer. She directed <i>On a different shelf</i> (2008) and produced <i>His mother's son</i> (2007). She is currently Performing Arts Manager at the newly opened Mangere Arts Centre, which showcases Pasifika theatre.
<b>Jenni Heka (i)</b>	Actress and theatre practitioner. She is currently the Pacific Island Playwright Development Coordinator for Playmarket, and coordinates the Banana Boat Writers group, which helps emerging playwrights.
<b>Stacey Leilua (i)</b>	Actress from Samoan descent. She is one of the founding members of Kila Kokonut Krew, Auckland based theatre company. She also acted in <i>The Songmaker's chair</i> (2003) by Albert Wendt.
<b>Salesi Leota (i)</b>	Wellington based theatre maker of Tongan descent. He was a collaborator on <i>Vula</i> (2005) with Nina Nawalowalo.
<b>Pos Mavaega (i)</b>	Musical manager of Christchurch based theatre group, Pacific Underground.
<b>Elisabeth O'Connor (i)</b>	Literary manager at the Court theatre, Christchurch.
<b>Jonathan Riley (i)</b>	Emerging playwright and actor. He acted in <i>His mother's son</i> (2007) by Unasa and is currently involved with Banana Boat playwrights.

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